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‘The Hand of the English’

- The involvement of the BBC in Anglo-Iranian relations between 1970-1977

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“When a subject is highly controversial...one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (1928).

Image on front cover taken from footage of the BBC programme *Panorama: Iran - Oil, Barrels and Guns* (1973). The statue is that of Mohammad Reza Shah. Within the film the interviewer asks Mohammad Reza Shah “do you think the great civilization can be a reality when people aren’t really free to speak their own minds?” The Shah responds “well that depends on what you mean by freedom...”

Table of Contents

Introduction

Within his account of the Islamic Revolution, *The Priest and the King,* Desmond Harney, a former British diplomat in Teheran, made reference to the "old Iranian conviction of 'the hand of the English' (*dast-e Englis-ha*)."[1] In a recent conversation I had with a former British Ambassador to Iran, the same phrase was brought up.[2] It was implied that in summoning this phrase amongst Iranians, a laugh and a knowing look might be exchanged; insinuating that as a phrase it still carries a certain weight, holding a mythological status even in the twenty-first century. To prove the potency of the term, one has only to read Iraj Pezeshkzad's novel, *My Uncle Napoleon* (1973). The title character, Uncle Napoleon, is obsessed with the idea that the English were behind all of Iran's misfortunes. Adapted into a popular television series in 1976, both the book and series were banned following the Islamic Revolution, yet have continued to thrive underground.[3] Given such widespread regard for the influence of the British, it is not surprising that the last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, also perceived the British to have a hand in all Iranian affairs. This is the starting point for my work; the deep conviction that the British were in control.[4]

The most obvious manifestations of the British presence in Iran were the British Foreign Office and the BBC Persian Service (henceforth BBCPS). Launched in December 1940 as part of the Foreign Office's campaign to develop and increase international communications overseas, the BBCPS came to be viewed by Iranians as one of their most trusted news sources.[5] Its main rival, in

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[1] Desmond Harney, *The Priest and the King* (1998), p. 107.

[2] This conversation took place in October 2013.

[3] Azar Nafisi, 'The Secret Garden,' in the Guardian review section of *The Guardian* (13 May 2006), p. 21, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/13/featuresreviews.guardianreview26

[4] Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (2004), p. 13.

[5] Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, 'The BBC Persian Service 1941-1979,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2008), 28:4, pp. 515-516.

terms of media output, was the Russian-run Radio Teheran.[6] Thus there was obviously a political importance to the BBCPS as an alternative source of news to the pro-Communist Radio Teheran; and even more so in terms of a battle over news hegemony given the Cold War context of the era.

The significance of the BBCPS, however, lies not just in its role as a media enterprise, but in its part in the triangle which existed between the BBCPS, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (henceforth the FCO[7]), and the Shah. Essentially, after the founding of the BBCPS, the BBC quickly became deemed to hold significant 'power' within Iran. Indeed Mojtaba Minovi, a Persian intellectual amongst the founding members of the Service, was reputed to have delivered broadcasts in 1941 which had 'driven the Shah from his throne.'[8] And Mohammad Reza Shah believed that he too faced dissent in the form of the BBCPS. The Shah's conviction that the BBC had instigated the unrest which resulted in the 1979 revolution was only heightened by the BBC broadcast of an interview with Ayatollah Khomeini, during which images against the Shah were also featured, including film of the words 'Down with the dictator Shah' graffitied across a wall.[9] In his memoirs, the Shah reaffirmed his suspicion of the BBC, writing 'from the beginning of 1978 their Persian language broadcasts consisted of virulent attacks against my regime.'[10] Was this just paranoia on the part of the Shah, or was it justified?

Essentially, the foundation to the Shah's claims lay in the direct funding of the BBC External Services[11] by the British FCO. And as such, the Shah deemed the BBCPS to be a tool of the British government. The British consistently rebutted these assertions with the explanation that

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[6] Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO): 8/2762: Review of the BBC Persian Service, (July 1976).

[7] Previously known as the Foreign Office, it was renamed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office after a merger between the two offices in 1968.

[8] BBC Memo, Miss E. Burton to Miss Edmond, Secretariat, 23 September 1941, quoted in F. Safiri and H. Shahidi, 'Great Britain xiii. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC),' *Encyclopædia Iranica,* XI/3, pp. 276-286, available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/great-britain-xiii (accessed 18 October 2013).

[9] Broadcast on the BBC in 1978, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00prspl

[10] Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story* (1980), p. 163.

[11] Renamed the BBC World Service in 1988.

the BBC retained editorial independence, which was seen as the cornerstone of the service's credibility, and thus was in no way subservient to the will of the British government.[12] Essentially the BBC believed that through their upholding of the value of impartiality within broadcasting, they provided a crucial service to the people; to the masses. And yet who actually heard, or read, the broadcasts? How many people had access to the technology in order to retrieve the information on offer? Yes, the evolution of the media was accompanied by an increase in the possibilities of the medium, but it was not solely an inclusive agency and should also be regarded as a means of exclusion. This is one dimension of a foreign media source which requires significant attention; what was the actual impact of the BBCPS? Was the listening audience in fact primarily made up of the Shah and the Iranian elite? And if so, was this preoccupation with the BBC by the Shah simply causing more damage to his increasingly delicate situation (circumstances which will be elucidated further in the first chapter) as ruler of Iran, given that his energies were directed intensely on this issue? There is a further problem regarding the platform of the BBC; impartiality is not a fact, it wavers according to a persons' values. Furthermore, how is it possible for the Press, or in this case the BBC, to speak for a group or people, or a nation, who are divided in opinion?

These are the questions which need to be considered in relation to the BBC, including the BBCPS, during the 1970s. Was the BBCPS reliant on the FCO for editorial guidance as a result of their funding? Or was there substantial leeway which allowed the broadcasters editorial control? Was it the BBC or the British government who was pulling the strings regarding the broadcasts of the BBCPS? And who were these two institutions seeking to represent; the Iranian people or British interests? Finally, what did the Shah hope to achieve through his sustained observation of the foreign press, particularly the BBC?

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[12] Sreberny and Torfeh, 'The BBC Persian Service 1941-1979,' p. 522.

Within this brief explanation of the tangled network of partnerships, the potential influence and importance of the media is discernible. Indeed, with the ever-growing prominence of the media worldwide, an examination of the role played by the media during the 1970s is a fascinating dimension of international politics to consider, providing part of the historical context from which the media has derived its role in current-day international affairs. In fitting with this particular study, a reflection on the changes in the BBC overseas services during the twentieth century illustrates how the broadcasting sensibilities altered in relation to the shifting context for the provision of these services. While originally established as an Empire Service to provide a connection for those living abroad, with the onslaught of the Second World War the British government asked the BBC to increase their output to foreign countries in order to combat the propaganda of rival stations; again prompting the notion of a battle being fought, alongside that of the military, over control of the airwaves.[13] As the twentieth century unfolded, the BBC reacted accordingly, to the challenges of Cold War geopolitics or decolonization.[14] Correspondingly, the media has contributed to the strengthening of relations amongst states and yet also been to the detriment of these same relations; it is the fourth dimension of international affairs - a reference to Edmund Burke's idea of the *Fourth Estate*, which will be considered later.[15]

A succinct interlude is necessary here in order to explain the differences between the various sections of the BBC, particularly regarding the BBC World Service (BBCWS) and the BBCPS. The BBC World Service was originally founded as the BBC Empire Service in 1932, then renamed as

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[13] F. Safiri and H. Shahidi, 'Great Britain xiii. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC),' *Encyclopædia Iranica,* XI/3, pp. 276-286, available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/great-britain-xiii (accessed 17 July 2014).

[14] Alban Webb, 'Cross-Theme Research,' *Tuning In - Researching Diasporas at the BBC World Service, http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/diasporas/cross-research/bbc-world-service-historical-pespectives*

[15] Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media since 1945* (1997), p. 21.

the BBC Overseas Service in 1939, before being assigned its current label in 1965.[16] Furthermore, while initially an English-spoken service, the BBC quickly began to add broadcasts in other languages which in turn became their own services, such as the BBC Persian Service. Thus the BBCWS continues to be broadcast in English, accessible throughout the world, in addition to the individual BBC language services. A telegram from Nicholas Barrington, of the FCO, to Sir Anthony Parsons, British Ambassador to Iran from 1974-1979, provides a useful distinction between the two.[17] In the first place, the World Service is broadcast in English and thus aimed at English-speaking foreigners, in contrast to the BBCPS which carries content in Persian. Moreover the BBCWS is aimed at a worldwide audience, and therefore differs from the BBC vernacular services which contain content relevant to the local audience regarding local affairs.[18] Essentially, then, the BBC World Service is the overarching term for the various language services provided by the BBC, but is also a radio station in its own right. Lastly, from its founding until 1 April 2014, the BBCWS was funded by the FCO.[19]

Recent Scholarship

The most recent scholarship in this field, with a focus on the work of the BBC, can be found within a research project conducted over a four year period between 2007-11, *Tuning In: Researching Diasporas at the BBC World Service,* which was followed up by the publication in January 2014 of *Persian Service: The BBC and British Interests in Iran.*[20] Markedly, the authors of this work, Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, have focused on framing their archival work

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[16] 'The 1960s - BBC World Service', http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/history/story/2007/02/070122_html_60s.shtml (accessed online 28 June 2014).

[17] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from N J Barrington to Sir A D Parsons on "BBC Persian Service", (20 July 1976).

[18] *ibid.*

[19] 'About - BBC World Service', http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldserviceradio/help/faq (accessed online 28 June 2014).

[20] Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh, *Persian Service: The BBC and British Interests in Iran* (2014).

within the concepts of *public diplomacy* and *soft power* in order to assess the role played by the BBC in its capacity as a foreign broadcaster.

In relation to the aforementioned *Tuning In* project, it is important to note that the research which specifically deals with the involvement of the BBCPS in British-Persian relations has been somewhat limited to three historical moments; the removal of Reza Shah in 1941, the UK-Iran oil negotiations during 1948-1953, including the Mosaddeq era, and the period immediately prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.[21] The publication of *Persian Service* has extended this scope to include two more episodes which the authors have deemed to be 'pivotal' in some sense. The work incorporates BBC broadcasting to Afghanistan, and brings the whole project 'up to date' with coverage of the establishment of BBC Persian Television in 2009.

Alternatively, I have focused on the period between 1971 and 1977; the second half of an era described by Ali Ansari as the 'halcyon years of Mohammad Reza Shah's rule.'[22] From 1965, the decade witnessed steady economic growth within Iran, based on her oil resources, and a, not unconnected, elevation of the Shah on the world political stage. Significantly, Great Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971 provided an opportunity for Iran to reassert hegemony over the region after a hundred and fifty years.[23] Moreover this time period also witnessed the celebration of 2500 years of the Iranian monarchy in a lavish ceremony at Persepolis; the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, deemed the ancestors of the Persians.[24] In short, the years 1971-1977 were important ones for the Shah as he established himself as an international figure presiding over a country on the verge of an economic breakthrough; and this was the image that the Shah wished to be presented to the world. Yet, as will be considered, this image was often at

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[21] Sreberny and Torfeh, 'The BBC Persian Service 1941-1979', p. 515.

[22] Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran* (2006), p. 57.

[23] J. C. Hurewitz, 'The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 401 (1972), p. 114.

[24] Talinn Grigor, 'Preserving the Antique Modern: Persepolis '71', *Future Anterior,* 2:1 (2005), p. 23.

odds with reality, and it fell to the press to report such discrepancies, much to the dismay of the Shah.

Methodology

In order to consider fully the triangle of partnerships which existed between the BBC, the FCO and the Shah, I undertook archival research in the UK, at both the BBC Written Archives Centre (henceforth BBC WAC), in Reading, and the National Archives at Kew, which contains documents and correspondence from the FCO.[25] The material at the BBC WAC ranged from information pertaining to particular broadcasts, programme schedules and audience ratings, to correspondence, and drafts of letters, between members of the BBC, or FCO, in relation to complaints or issues which had arisen. The majority of the correspondence relating to the BBCPS was done via telegram, given that this was the quickest method to convey information at the time. The documents in the FCO archives, which were useful for this study, consisted, for the most part, of communications between various members of the FCO, both in the UK and Iran, and the Iranian government. Some telegrams were to be, and had been, read by a number of people, a list of whom was often to be found on the paper copy. There were also a number of reports relating to the BBCPS which were distributed amongst certain individuals in the FCO.

The scope of my material was limited by two key factors. Firstly, given the extensive breadth of files in both sets of archives, I chose to search for information relating to the BBCPS by the title of the files. For instance, folders in the National Archives had been labelled 'British Policy in Iran 1974-1978' or 'BBC Overseas Service to Iran (1973),' to name but a few. These dossiers naturally contained a wealth of information relating to the label on the file. However, there are surely many more documents relating to the BBCPS in folders with other names. Yet, unfortunately,

[25] The labelling of the source materials differs in both archives; some documents have a title, often they have the name of a recipient, and usually include the author and date. However they all have a reference number relating to the file in which they can be located in the archives.

due to time limits, I was unable to extend my archival research to include files other than those whose titles were directly relevant to the BBC and British policy in Iran. The same is true of my archival research in the BBC WAC. Given that it is necessary to outline the topic of research before a visit, I was limited, in the sense that I could not delve into any random folder, to the files provided for me which had been deemed relevant to the brief summary of my work I had provided. Thus it is clear that the scope of my sources was restricted by what exists in the aforementioned archives, and was available to me, and, to some extent, dependent on the labelling system of the various organisations.

Moreover, it is essential to note that, fundamentally, I have limited my work to English sources. As such this study predominantly focuses on what was broadcast by the BBC outside of Iran, but in relation to Iran. These broadcasts were, however, often retransmitted in some form via the BBCPS, which is another intriguing dimension of the workings of the BBC in Iran.

Lastly, it is worth noting the phenomenon that people are more likely to complain than to praise.[26] Thus the majority of the written sources in the archives which relate to the activities of the BBC are, more often than not, in connection to content which angered the Shah, and thereby proffer a considerably critical view of the BBC in Iran.

In addition to an exposition of my archival research, I will also provide a brief review on the book *The Persian Service,* mentioned earlier, given that it is has been so recently published and provides the most comprehensive study on research undertaken in relation to the BBCPS. Indeed it was after consideration of the theoretical framework used by Srberney and Torfeh in their work, that of *public diplomacy* and *soft power,* that I came to the decision to view my own research in relation to the concept of the *Fourth Estate.*

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[26] Roy F. Baymeister, Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer, Kathleen D. Vohs, 'Bad Is Stronger Than Good', *Review of General Psychology*, 5:4 (2001), pp. 323-370.

Chapter One - A Short History and a Book Review

The Reign of the 'last Shah'

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi came to the throne after the abdication of his father Reza Shah in 1941. Young and naive in terms of ruling a country, he was described by some elder statesmen as a 'weak man in a strong position.'[27] The strength of the position he found himself in as Shah of Iran is certainly debatable, as he faced challenges from both inside and outside of Iran. Indeed, the British role in the ousting of Reza Shah surely demonstrated that 'others' were, to an extent, pulling the strings. Denis Wright, British Ambassador to Iran between 1963-1971, even noted that it was the British who had 'decided to give the young Crown Prince...a chance to prove himself,' continuing that 'he could always be got rid of if he did not come up to expectation.'[28] Furthermore, Dr. Mossadeq's brief expropriation of authority in 1951-53 is illustration enough of the opposition the Shah faced from within his own country. Importantly, though, Mohammad Reza Shah was convinced of the destiny of his reign, and certain that he was supported by 'a grateful people' who, he believed, mandated his rule as king.[29] Ansari footnotes a statement put to the British Ambassador by the Shah in 1958 which conveys something of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's attitude towards politics. The Shah asks 'They [the people] might perhaps serve as clay: who then is the potter?'[30] Returning from his brief exile in 1953, the Shah was convinced even more so in his status as the savior of his people, and the ensuing political ascendancy, in which the Shah and his supporters found themselves, boosted the Shah's belief in the providence of his reign.

While the remainder of the decade proved relatively stable for the Shah, by the early 1960s it was deemed necessary by some of his closest ministers, such as Asadollah Alam and the Prime

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[27] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (2012), p. 155.

[28] Denis Wright, *The Persians Amongst the English* (1985), p. 214.

[29] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 156.

[30] *ibid.,* p. 157.

Minister Ali Amini, to launch a 'revolution from above' in order to reinforce the Shah's position; 'a bloodless revolution that would at once take the wind out of the sails of the Shah's critics and place the Shah firmly at the centre of the political stage, as a champion of the people.'[31] And so, in 1963, the White Revolution was born, so-called in reference to the need for a revolution without bloodshed; 'designed to preempt a Red Revolution.'[32] Intended to rally the support of the people, the main aims of the White Revolution included emancipation of women, land reform, and 'western modernization.'[33] In turn, the people were hopeful for democracy.[34] However it was during this era that the reverse happened, as the Shah waived the constitution and muzzled the press in order to attain his 'White Revolution' as quickly as possible.[35] Indeed, it is essential to note the strict censorship of the Iranian press under the Shah, even though there is little documentation on it.[36] Essentially the Shah reined in the freedoms which had been enjoyed during the constitutional period; publishing licenses became prerequisite for newspapers, difficult to obtain, and still subject to censorship.[37] Significantly, the Shah had postponed his coronation until a time when Iran, and the image of himself, were prospering.[38] And yet the occasion of his crowning in 1967 might instead be viewed as the beginning of his fall.

A key signal of dissension amongst the Iranian population was the rise of a guerilla movement, the beginnings of which Ervand Abrahamian traces to the summer of 1963 when mass

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[31] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 160.

[32] Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (1993), p. 140.

[33] A controversial term, but implied the progressive transition of a society from a 'pre-modern' or 'traditional' state to a 'modern' one, along the lines of the developments which had taken place in Europe and America.

[34] Ali M. Ansari, 'The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power', *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), p. 13.

[35] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 161.

[36] D. Parvaz, 'Cambridge project: Iran's press censorship', http://dparvaz.wordpress.com/familiar-beast-press-censorship-in-iran/ (accessed 2 August 2014).

[37] *ibid.*

[38] The commentary from British footage of the coronation remarks that "the Shah was at last satisfied that he was worthy of wearing the crown." http://www.britishpathe.com/video/shah-of-persias-coronation-state-opening-of-parlia (accessed online 17 July 2014).

violence was used to crush peaceful demonstrations against the regime.[39] Abrahamian argues that this instance exploited the Shah's willingness to use force, and revealed his determination to root out the opposition.[40] Disclosures which caused younger members, in particular, of the opposition to question methods of resistance and in turn to look to the tactics used in China, Cuba, and Algeria through translations of the work of Mao, Che Guevara and Franz Fanon.[41] These ideas took root, and the formation of two significant guerrilla movements, the *Fedayeen* and the *Mujahideen,* signified a belief, amongst many leftist Iranians, in the need for an armed struggle and revolutionary socialism.[42] The origins of both of these movements can be found in the early 1960s, evolving with political aid from different wings of the National Front - Mossadeq's party.[43]

SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, successfully managed to arrest, and/or execute, a significant number of members of both of these groups, to the extent that by the mid-1970s most of the founding members were gone and the activities of the movements had subsided. However, crucially, they were not completely eradicated and continued to function at a more discrete level until the uprisings in 1978-1979 when they re-emerged to take advantage of the revolutionary situation.[44] The intensity with which the Shah pursued these insurgent groups, utilizing his secret police, is illustrative of his recognition of the delicate nature of his position and thus the need to quell any opposition unreservedly. The expansion of SAVAK, and routine use of torture[45], further

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[39] Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977', *MERIP Reports,* No. 86 (Mar.- Apr., 1980), p. 4.

[40] *ibid.*

[41] *ibid.*

[42] *ibid.*

[43] Riaz Hassan, 'Revolutionary Islam in Iran: Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship? by Surdosh Irfani', (Review) *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Apr., 1985), p. 470; Michael M. J. Fischer, '*Revolutionary Islam in Iran: Popular Liberation or Religious Dictatorship?* by Surdosh Irfani', (Review), *International Journal of Middle East Studies,*Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), p. 88.

[44] Abrahamian, 'The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977', p. 12.

[45] The issue of torture would continue to plague the Shah for the remainder of his reign, particularly in relation to human rights as organisations from Europe and America, such as Amnesty International, became involved.

exemplified the frailty of the Shah's situation.[46] Moreover, reflection on the overarching views of the two guerilla movements provides a useful contextualization of the internal situation in Iran. Essentially, both wings argued that Iran was dominated by imperialism, especially from America, and that the White Revolution had transformed Iran from a feudal society into a bourgeois one heavily dependent on Western capitalism, and thereby sustained through the Shah's veneration of Western leaders and their cultures.[47] These accusations of imperialism, both American and British, would continue to surface for the remainder of the Shah's reign.

Aside from the National Front, and those in accord with their policies, there also existed another political opposition; the *Tudeh* party. Founded in 1941, the *Tudeh* party was in effect a restoration of the orthodox pro-Russian Iranian communist party of 1921-1931 which had been crushed by Reza Shah.[48] As with the guerrilla movement, the *Tudeh* party was both purged and forced underground. The import of the *Tudeh* party, as regards this study in particular, lies in its relations with the Soviet Union, and the Russian attempts to make inroads into Iran.

Lastly, the Shah faced mounting religious opposition to his rule. Significantly, state and religion were separated in Shiite Iran. The relationship between the monarchy and the *ulama*, however, was a complicated one. While the *ulama* were important allies of the Iranian monarchy, at times the relationship became a highly problematic one. In the Pahlavi period, this relationship became more strained, due, in part, to the ideas of 'modernization' championed by the Pahlavi monarchs, ideas which did not sit well with a large number of the *ulama*. Indeed, Mohammad Reza Shah's programme of bureaucratic centralization, which continued the reforms set in motion by his father Reza Shah, persisted in infringing upon the autonomy previously enjoyed by the *ulama*; dress

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[46] Michael Axworthy, *Iran: Empire of the Mind* (2007), p. 255.

[47] Abrahamian, 'The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977', p. 10.

[48] Fred Halliday, 'The Tudeh Party in Iranian Politics: Background Notes', *MERIP Reports,* No. 86 (Mar.- Apr., 1980), p. 22.

codes for *ulama* for instance.[49] The land reform aspect of the Shah's White Revolution was another issue which angered the *ulama* who viewed it as contrary to both the Constitution and the Shia faith, not to mention the portioning off of large quantities of land protected under *waqf* (religious endowments).[50]

Notably, there existed discord within the Iranian religious classes. Yet the highest ranking Shia theologian between 1937-1961 was Ayatollah Borujerdi, a conservative apolitical cleric, who had come to a mutual agreement, in the 1940s, with the young Mohammad Reza Shah which included silencing any politically motivated members of the *ulama.*[51] However the death of Borujerdi in March 1961, in addition to the controversies of the White Revolution, caused a shift in the relationship between the state and *ulama,* and some clerics became increasingly outspoken.[52]

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was one such figure, and his presence looms over the history of modern Iran, particularly as the figurehead of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. While this is not the place for an in-depth consideration of the role he played, it is important to note that Khomeini's exile to Iraq in 1963, for berating the Shah of granting "capitulations"[53] to the Americans, demonstrates that he was already, by the early 1960s, a prominent figure of opposition to the Shah.[54] Moreover, Abrahamian concisely observes that Khomeini 'transformed Shiism from a conservative quietist faith into a militant political ideology that challenged both the imperial powers and the country's upper class.'[55] This

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[49] Houchang E. Chehabi, 'Staging the Emperor's New Clothes: Dress Codes and Nation Building under Reza Shah', *Iranian Studies,* Vol. 26, No. 3/4 (1993), p. 22.

[50] Akhavi Shahrough, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (1980), pp. 90-94; Ansari, *Confronting Iran,* p. 48; Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (1965), p. 505.

[51] Abrahamian, *Khomeinism,* p. 8.

[52] Taghavi notes the passivity among the clergy, particularly regarding involvement in politics, which frustrated the original group of *Fedayeen*; Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi, ''Fadaeeyan-i Islam': The Prototype of Islamic Hard-Liners in Iran', *Middle Eastern Studies,* 40:1 (2004), p. 161.

[53] Reference to contracts which had existed between the Ottoman Empire and European states, granting rights and privileges which exempted foreigners from local laws including prosecution and taxation.

[54] Roy Parviz Mottahedeh, 'Iran's Foreign Devils', *Foreign Policy*, No. 38 (1980), pp. 19-20.

[55] Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, p. 3.

change in the relationship between state and religion had been effected by both parties, and yet would predominantly be to the detriment of the Shah.

The International Arena

If these were some, certainly not all, of the hostilities faced by the Shah from within Iran, what of the international context? The enterprises of Russia, as noted previously, which had originally been somewhat limited to the Anglo-Russian rivalry which was primarily dominated by the issue of oil, were increased by the ideological struggles of the Cold War. The Shah found himself situated within this framework; both to his advantage, and at his expense.[56] As argued by Ansari, to lay the blame of developments in Iran on international actors would be to 'fall victim to the dogma of anti-imperialism', but at the same time the Cold War provided a 'more radicalized and uncompromising vocabulary' which seeped into the Iranian mindset.[57]

In terms of the more immediate geographical location of Iran, in reference to its long borders shared with Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, with access to both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and its position within an area often referred to as the Middle East, it was Western powers, such as the USA, who seemed to continue to dominate the politics of the region, rather than events elsewhere in the Middle East. The Baghdad Pact, signed in 1955 between Iran, Iraq and Turkey, reflected both the continued dominance of the concerns of external powers, specifically the American notion that a regional military bloc was formed, and the shared interest of the monarchs of Iran and Iraq against the rising tide of nationalism.[58] However the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy of Iraq in 1958 drastically altered Gulf politics as Iraq became an unstable revolutionary republic which could challenge Iran, both in terms of her

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[56] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 157.

[57] *ibid.*

[58] Fred Halliday, 'Arabs and Persians beyond the Geopolitics of the Gulf', *Cahiers d'Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le monde Turco-Iranien* [En ligne], 22 (1996), http://cemoti.revues.org/143#ftn12 (accessed 11 June 2014).

influence in the region, and in relation to her monarchical political system.[59] In turn the Shah was exceedingly wary of Iraq, especially in light of the assertion of Iraqi nationalist aspirations along the Iranian border, and the issue of the Kurdish question.[60] Yet Iraq was of immense importance to the *ulama* as a Shia country, and especially given that the major Shia holy sites of Najaf and Karbala were to be found in Iraq, and thus visited by numerous Iranian pilgrims. Accordingly, the Iran-Iraq relationship was a further point of contention between the *ulama* and the Shah.

The influence of external states also shifted during this era as an end to British military and administrative dominance in the Gulf was assured by decision of the British Labour Government in 1968.[61] Between 1971 and 1977, the British withdrew from Kuwait, South Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirates, and Oman, and her place was filled, to an extent, by the USA, which had been increasing its naval presence and had become the main arms supplier to pro-western states in the Gulf region.[62] Meanwhile relations between Iran and the USSR had cooled during the late 1950s, and early 1960s, to the extent that Iran felt there was no longer a threat from her Northern neighbour.[63] But instead, the cold war conflict was now superimposed onto the regional conflict between Iran and Iraq as the USSR backed the new Iraqi republic. A border war between Iran and Iraq ensued in the years 1969-1975, primarily over the question of the frontier, but in which the Kurds, and their plight, became caught up in as both sides backed different Kurdish enclaves.[64] The

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[59] J. A. Kechichian, "Baghdad Pact", *Encyclopædia Iranica,* III/4, p. 415; available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baghdad-pact (accessed 20 July 2014).

[60] Swearingen offers a useful commentary on the history of the border dispute between Iran and Iraq which he deemed to be fundamental when considering the origins of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88; Will D. Swearingen, 'Geopolitical Origins of the Iran-Iraq War', *Geographical Review,* 78:4 (1988), p. 408.

[61] Denis Wright and Elizabeth Monroe, *The Changing Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf* (1972), p. 13.

[62] Sepehr Zabir, 'Iran's Policy toward the Persian Gulf', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 7:3 (1976), p. 346; Joe Stork, James Paul, 'Arms Sales and the Militarization of the Middle East', *MERIP Reports*, Vol. 13 (1983), pp. 6-7.

[63] Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (1965), p. 489; Halliday, 'Arabs and Persians beyond the Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf, p. 14.

[64] Nadar Entessar, 'The Kurds in Post-Revolutionary Iran and Iraq', *Third World Quarterly,* 6:4 (1984), p. 916, pp. 919-921.

settlement reached between the two states, at Algiers in 1975, included an agreement on non-interference in each other's internal affairs; violation of which would play a large part in the Iran-Iraq war that raged between 1980-1988, and during which nationalist themes were rife.[65]

There existed another dividing line, however, when it came to the issue of oil, which found Iran and Iraq together in opposition to the Saudis and other Arab Gulf states.[66] Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia made up three of the five founding member states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), created at Baghdad in 1960, and which sought to 'co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries.'[67] However, disagreements emerged in the early 1970s as Iran and Iraq were both, broadly, of the persuasion that oil prices should be increased. When, in 1973, the Shah refrained from joining the Arab oil embargo which cut off oil exports to America in protest at American military support of Israel, and therefore against Egypt and Syria during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Shah had clearly shown his 'western' colours.[68]

As well as angering other states within the region, the Shah's position, as a supporter of all things 'western,'[69] also frustrated various groups within Iran, including the clerics. Moreover his accumulation of the wealth from the Iranian oil reserves, and failure to address real issues in the country, all amounted to the continuing deterioration of the domestic situation.[70] The position of the Shah was clearly a fragile one, and his attempts to increasingly centralize power into his own hands

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[65] Known as the Algiers Accord; http://www.parstimes.com/history/algiers_accord.html (accessed 20 July 2014).

[66] Halliday, 'Arabs and Persians beyond the Geopolitics of the Gulf', 18.

[67] Manucher Farmanfarmaian and Roxanna Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil* (1997), p. 344; Timothy W. Luke, 'Dependent Development and the Arab OPEC states', *The Journal of Politics,* 45:4 (1983), pp. 982-983; http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/24.htm (accessed 12 June 2014).

[68] Farmanfarmaian and Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil*, p. 409; Zabir, 'Iran's Policy toward the Persian Gulf', p. 346.

[69] Jalal al-Ahmad coined the term *Gharbzadegi* in reference to this issue of 'Westoxification" or "Westruckedness". See Bran Hanson, 'The "Westoxification" of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad, and Shari'ati', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15 (1983), pp. 1-23.

[70] Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 13.

can be seen as an attempt to control the tenuous state of affairs, thereby making the presentation of a powerful image to those abroad even more essential.

British Foreign Policy

And what of the British role in Iran? To be sure, their priority, from the outset, was oil. While the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), established in 1908, was essentially a private organization, in 1914 the British government invested in the company to the extent that they held 51% of the shares.[71] As such, the company began to be considered as a national enterprise, and many governments, including the Iranian one, saw the "hidden hand of the British" in the activities of the APOC.[72] And when, in 1932, the Majlis declared the D'Arcy concession of 1901 to be null and void, the British government took up the cause of the APOC. A new concession, signed by the (newly-named) Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the Iranian government in April 1933, secured the company's operations in Iran for the next 60 years, thereby extending the original concession by 32 years, and effectively leaving Iranian oil revenues at the mercy of the British government and her tax fixing.[73]

As has already been mentioned though, the British presence in the region was waning, particularly following their decision to withdraw from the Gulf in 1968. Following this, their continued dealings with Iran were primarily concerned 'with the promotion and protection of highly lucrative commercial contracts.'[74] Arms sales to Iran proved particularly profitable after 1970 as the Shah used oil revenues to build up a military force which could secure him an authoritative position

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[71] Mostafa Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle - Iran's Oil Nationalization and its Aftermath* (1992), pp. 15-16.

[72] *ibid.,* p. 16.

[73] *ibid.,* pp. 36-37.

[74] Edward Posnett, 'Treating His Imperial Majesty's Warts: British Policy towards Iran 1977-79', *Iranian Studies,* 45:1, p. 120.

in the region. In 1977, military and security expenditure in Iran accounted for 40% of the government's budget; a demand which was predominantly met by America, but by Britain also.[75]

Aside from mercenary interests, the British were also wary of Soviet inroads being made in neighbouring countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and supporting the Shah was one way to counterbalance the potential of Soviet influence in the region.

Notably, it is essential to remember the historical relationship between Britain and Iran during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the phenomena of national memory.[76] Recollection of British intrusion in Iranian affairs would proffer an image of British meddling, and for their own benefit; from the Reuters telegraph concession in 1872, and the tobacco concession signed in 1890, to British support of Reza Khan's coup in 1921, and in turn their perceived role in the 1953 coup which ousted the popular nationalist Prime Minister Dr. Mossadeq. Moreover, Iranians were particularly suspicious of foreign broadcasts which had been 'specifically beamed on Iran...This goes back to wartime days and also to the subsequent years when "Imperialism" was rife and vernacular services were universally regarded as propaganda weapons of one side or the other.'[77] Accordingly the impression that the British were behind everything was rife in Iranian society; and the BBC Persian Service suffered from this same perception through association.

The role of the BBC Persian Service

The Shah's sensitivity to criticism proved highly problematic for the BBC Persian Service, and the FCO, as any mildly critical remark from the former was believed by the Shah to verify the British government's adverse stance toward Iran. As such, the BBCPS had to navigate a path between these two political authorities, while at the same time following its own editorial policy as

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[75] In 1977, Iranian imports accounted for 30% of the UK's total defence sales. Posnett, 'Treating His Imperial Majesty's Warts', p. 121.

[76] Rosemarie Scullion, 'Feminizing National Memory: Mossadegh, Milani and "The Hidden Half", *South Central Review,* 23:2 (2006), pp. 2-3.

[77] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from A D Parsons to N J Barrington on the "BBC Persian Service", (4 July 1976).

an independent broadcaster. In *Persian Service,* Annabelle Sreberny and Massoumeh Torfeh have attempted to show the struggle faced by the BBCPS against the constraints of the FCO, which itself was consistently berated by the Iranian embassy. Their extensive archival research has led them to place their sources within the theoretical framework of *public diplomacy* and *soft power,* however the usefulness of these concepts is debatable in relation to the BBCPS and will be considered in the final chapter of this study.

Persian Service - Public Diplomacy and the Fourth Estate

Sreberny and Torfeh refer to the 'semantic soup of terms used to define international communication,' including; propaganda, public diplomacy, psychological warfare, soft power and nation-branding.[78] The remainder of the first chapter of the book, *Persian* Service*,* outlines the evolution of the terms *public diplomacy* and *soft power,* and their coinages, both British and Iranian. David Culbert provides a general definition of *public diplomacy* as 'some form of diplomacy that goes beyond what one government official says to another - it is intended, often, to influence foreign publics, and is generally indirect in its effects.'[79] Relatedly, the advent of *public diplomacy* is commonly traced back to the communications revolution of the late twentieth century and its effect on traditional diplomacy, meaning diplomacy carried out in person by ambassadors and their envoys; government-to-government engagement.

It is essential to note, as is done so by Sreberny and Torfeh, that the term *public diplomacy* was coined in the USA and, more specifically, is often accredited to Edmund Gullion and his establishment of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy in 1965.[80] Guillon offered the following definition of public diplomacy in March 1966; 'the means by which governments, private

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[78] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service*, p. 13.

[79] David Culbert, 'Public Diplomacy and the International History of Mass Media: The USA, the Kennedy Assassination and The World,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2010), 30.3, p. 422.

[80] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 13.

groups and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions.'[81] While Culbert recognizes these origins of the term, he adds that it was not used officially until the 1980s by the United States Information Agency (USIA), although he accepts that the USIA had engaged in 'acts' of public diplomacy prior to then.[82] Moreover, Culbert argues that the term did not seem to find acceptance worldwide until the 1990s, and for many not until after the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001.[83] What, then, does this tell us about the term *public diplomacy* given the reluctance with which it was taken up and the circumstances within which it was later adopted?

Indeed Sreberny and Torfeh assign the emergence of *new public diplomacy,* after the 9/11 attacks, to a reflection on 'the changing face of international relations as a range of non-state actors gained a role in world politics' and recognition of the ability of non-governmental organisations to 'communicate directly with foreign publics.'[84] However, had non-state actors really not played a part in world politics prior to this event, or period? Or was the development of this concept more a realization on the part of the American government that they needed a means by which they could attempt to 'control' these autonomous organisations? The answer is neither discernible nor required, yet it is worth bearing these ideas in mind when considering the concept of *public diplomacy*; predominantly that the concept emerged in an American context, and evolved within an environment in which the American government seemed to be losing some of their control as non-governmental organisations acted increasingly autonomously. That the term was not accepted by the wider milieu *per se* until after September 2001 is a further illustration of its adoption within an atmosphere rife with hostility and a need for explanations.

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[81] Edmund A. Guillon, quoted from March 1966, http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy/Definitions (accessed 27 May 1914).

[82] David Culbert, 'Public Diplomacy and the International History of Mass Media: The USA, the Kennedy Assassination and The World,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2010), 30:3, p. 421.

[83] *ibid.,* p. 422.

[84] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 14.

The authors go on to quote James Pamment, that the 'new' media landscape 'challenge[s] traditional foreign ministry 'gatekeeper' structures', in order to corroborate their assertion that the *new public diplomacy* reflected the change in international relations due to the ever-enlarging role of non-state actors.[85] To take up Pamment's reference of the new media threatening the 'traditional' diplomatic framework, it is worth considering earlier forms of media, such as the press, aspects of which have been 'outside' of this 'official' structure for the duration of the twentieth century.

Take for example the Northcliffe Press; a conglomerate of newspaper titles owned by Lord Northcliffe, formerly Alfred Harmsworth, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the years preceding the First World War, Lord Northcliffe and his press, particularly the *Daily Mail*, were accused of scaremongering as he pursued an editorial policy which publicized the expansion of the German Navy and the potential threat it posed to Britain.[86] Accordingly, his preoccupation with the state of British naval defenses reached its pinnacle with the *Daily Mail* 'Naval Scare' of 1909 which witnessed the declaration, in the issue of the 17 March, that 'there is nothing between sea supremacy and ruin.'[87] Lord Northcliffe was clearly using the medium of his newspapers to both inform the reading public of the situation, which he deemed so dire, and also as a means with which to lobby the politicians who relied, in part, on the press as a gauge of public opinion. Lord Northcliffe later used the *Daily Mail* in order to organize a protest meeting which caused Arthur Balfour[88] to declare his opposition to the Declaration of London in 1909, which concerned the laws of naval war, in the Commons.[89] These are just two of a host of examples which illustrate the influence which could be wielded by figures within the media industry. Indeed, Lord Northcliffe's

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[85] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 14; James Pamment, *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century* (2012), p. 20.

[86] J. Lee Thompson, 'Fleet Street Colossus: The Rise and Fall of Northcliffe, 1896-1922', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 25 (2006), p. 119.

[87] *Daily Mail* (17 March 1909), p. 4.

[88] Leader of the Opposition, and former Prime Minister 1902-1905.

[89] James D. Startt, 'Northcliffe the Imperialist: The Lesser-Known Years, 1902-1914', *Historian,* 51:1 (1988), p. 39.

recognition of the constraints which could be placed upon him, and his press, by the government is exemplified by his refusal of Prime Minister David Lloyd George's first offer of a cabinet post to Northcliffe in 1916,[90] with the declaration 'I can do better work if I maintain my independence and am not gagged by a loyalty that I do not feel towards the whole of your administration.'[91] Lord Northcliffe correctly identified that acceptance of such a position would limit his political independence, and that of his press, and in retaining his autonomy he remained subservient to no one; a position which enjoyed 'the peculiar advantage of immunity from overthrow by parliament or by electors' as Wickham Steed, editor of *The Times,* explained in a letter to Northcliffe in 1922.[92] Significantly, Lord Northcliffe also successfully released his newspaper titles, such as *The Times,* from their financial dependence on political parties, thereby helping to bring to an end the dominion of politicians within the realm of the press.[93]

This brief historical intermission away from the subject of this paper is necessary in order to establish the position entertained by British communications media prior even to the establishment of the BBC and, accordingly, its relevance lies in the need to provide some sort of prelude to the concept of *public diplomacy* as described in 1965. This may be offered in the conception of the *Fourth Estate*, the origins of which are commonly attributed to Edmund Burke in the late eighteenth century. Implicit in this concept is recognition of the three estates of the realm; the clergy, the nobility and the commoners, which were broadly recognised as the social orders of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period in Christian Europe. But in referring to the *Fourth Estate,* Burke was suggesting that there existed an alternative group; writers, reporters; the Press. In 1840, Thomas Carlyle explained Burke's hypothesis of the *Fourth Estate* within his lecture series on Heroes;

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[90] Northcliffe later accepted a government position as Director for Propaganda in 1917.

[91] Tom Clarke, *My Northcliffe Diary* (1931), p. 115.

[92] Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (1959), p. 830.

[93] Philippa Harrison, 'To what extent was Lord Northcliffe's reputation as a British public figure based on an illusory political power?', MA Honours Project in Modern History, University of St Andrews (Nov., 2012), unpublished.

> 'Burke said that there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a *Fourth Estate* much more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact, - very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our Parliament too. Printing, which comes out of Writing...is equivalent to Democracy...Whoever can speak, speaking now to a whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority...It matters not what rank he had...the requisite thing is, that he have a tongue which others will listen to.'[94]

A dismissal of, or at least a lack of scrutiny given to, the idea of the *Fourth Estate* seems to suggest that the communications revolution of the mid-late twentieth century presented an entirely new obstacle which governments had to deal with. Whereas, consideration of earlier medias in the twentieth, and even nineteenth, century might offer a more useful historical contextualisation in terms of the evolution of the role of media, especially as regards its position within and alongside the political sphere. As such, I will consider my research against this framework of analysis as well as examining it in relation to the concept of *public diplomacy* in order to establish the usefulness of the term.

A further reflection on Pamment's reference to the foreign ministry 'gatekeeper' structures might contrast this description with that of Philip Taylor's characterization of the international news gathering agencies as the 'gatekeepers' of international news.[95] In which direction is the information really passing through these 'gates'? And who is actually in control in these acts of *public diplomacy*? Those who outline, plan, and delegate, or those who hold the information in the first place?

One last comment is necessary in relation to Sreberny and Torfeh's remark on the 'evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communications to a two-way dialogue [which] supposedly

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[94] Thomas Carlyle, Lecture V. 'The Hero as man of Letters. Johnson, Rousseau, Burns.' (May 19, 1840), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1091/1091-h/1091-h.htm (accessed 27 May 2014).

[95] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service*, p. 14; Taylor, *Global Communications,* p. 68.

treats publics as co-creators of meaning and communication.'[96] Did this communication ever only happen in one direction? Surely the very essence of the word communication insinuates a response of some kind? The Latin verb *communico,* meaning 'to share', corroborates the idea that communication is an exchange of information, or a means of connection between people or places.[97] As will become evident in the second chapter of this paper, in the case of Iran there existed numerous communications in relation to BBC content, frequently between at least three parties following a controversial broadcast.

Persian Service - Soft Power and Propaganda

The second term chosen by Sreberny and Torfeh as fitting for the purpose of their study is *soft power.* They rightly reference Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, who first coined the term in 1990.[98] In a more recent article, Nye defined power as 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want,' and thus regards soft power as 'getting others to want the outcomes that you want' - cooperation rather than coercion.[99] The media's ability to shape the preference of others, to influence, makes it a key tool of soft power. For example the expansion of the BBC external services, and the creation of the Voice of America between 1940-1944, can be seen as wartime soft power resources.

The authors also briefly reference Herb Schiller and his argument that soft power is actually a euphemism for *cultural imperialism*; an assessment which they return to later in the book, albeit briefly.[100] It is worth pausing to consider the concept of *cultural imperialism* which emerged within

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[96] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 15.

[97] Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (1890), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0060%3Aentry%3Dcommunico.

[98] Joseph S. Nye, Jr. 'Soft Power', *Foreign Policy,* No. 80, (Autumn, 1990), pp. 153.171.

[99] Joseph S. Nye, Jr. 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 616 (Mar., 2008), pp. 94-95.

[100] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 15.

American media studies in the 1970s in reference to the alleged dominance of American entertainment commodities and cultural images.[101] Moreover, its prominence as a concept coincided with the great economic expansion in the South of American-based transnational corporations, thus would suggest that the need to explain the actions of non-state actors was already being addressed prior to the notion of *public diplomacy.*[102] It is essential to note, however, that the emergence of the concept of *cultural imperialism* can not be confined solely to 'western' discourse, as its use was also promoted by the Non-Aligned Movement in Algiers in the early 1970s, and Franz Fanon expressed his own notion of *cultural imperialism* in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* as early as 1963.[103] In turn, the Iranian thinker Ali Shari'ati, often considered the ideologue of the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, built his own concept of *cultural imperialism* in order to address the situation in Iran*,* the roots of which he finds in the rule of economic materialism; the value-system used by European countries for their own benefit.[104] Shari'ati's conception of *cultural imperialism* is certainly worth considering in relation to the idea of *public diplomacy* in the case of Iran.

Aside from the possible similarities with *cultural imperialism,* Guy Golan offers a useful distinction between *soft power* and *public diplomacy* as the following; 'the soft power approach is focused on government-to-citizen engagement, [while] the mediated public diplomacy approach is focused on government-to-citizen engagement that is mediated by a third party - the global news media.'[105] Relatedly, and significant to this study, Taylor refers to the quasi-autonomous position often enjoyed by media 'external services' within the diplomatic establishment.[106] These services

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[101] Ryan Dunch, 'Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity,' *History and Theory,* 41:3 (2002), P. 301.

[102] Colleen Roach, 'Cultural Imperialism and resistance in media theory and literary theory,' *Media Culture Society* (1997), Vol. 19, p. 44.

[103] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), p. 209, p. 313.

[104] Ali Shari'ati, 'Extraction and Refinement of Cultural Resources', in *Man and Islam* (trans.) Fatollah Marjani (1981), p. 40.

[105] Guy J. Golan, 'An Integrated Approach to Public Diplomacy,' *American Behavioral Scientist,* 57:9 (2013), http://abs.sagepub.com/content/57/9/1251 , p. 1251.

[106] Taylor, *Global Communications*, p. 77.

appear to exist between a number of structures, but are not bound to any of them. The BBC Persian Service, for example, is patently a component of the BBC, based in London, and yet it broadcasts from its office in Teheran - connected by any number of communications, yes, but to an extent free from the direct jurisdiction of central command. On the other hand, its base in Teheran could easily fall under the administration of the Iranian authorities. But, as a British corporation, which is financed by the British FCO, the British embassy (when in situ) clearly has a vested interest in the smooth operation of the BBC Persian Service, and thus the broadcasting service is drawn into the realm of diplomatic relations, which naturally attracts the attention of the Iranian government. But who is really calling the shots?

Sreberny and Torfeh also quote Nye regarding the issue of propaganda; a subject which seems to underlie most studies of media. Nye writes that 'if it degenerates into propaganda, public diplomacy not only fails to convince, but can be undercut by soft power. Instead it must remain a two-way process, because soft power depends, first and foremost, upon understanding the minds of others.'[107] Through this brief explanation, Nye illuminates the complexity of the web within which these terms exist and act; if public diplomacy can degenerate into propaganda then surely the differentiation between the two is not so clear cut? Although Nye also asserts that those skeptics who treat the term 'public diplomacy' as a euphemism for propaganda are missing the point; good public diplomacy has to go beyond propaganda in that it must be credible.[108] However Taylor maintains that credibility does not necessarily equate with the truth, and herein lies a further paradox which must be dealt with.[109] Indeed Taylor asserts that 'the very process of selection and omission, which is by definition part and parcel of the journalistic profession, brings us back into

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[107] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 16.

[108] Nye, 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,' p. 101.

[109] Taylor, *Global Communications,* p. 64.

the realm of propaganda,' and the question of intent.[110] This matter of purpose, and who outlines that objective, is critical when assessing the part of the BBC in Iran, and will be taken up in the third chapter of this study.

Within the conclusion of the first chapter, Sreberny and Torfeh admit that their overview of the discourses surrounding international communication is not definitive, nor overly critical.[111] Instead they assert 'that the actual practices and the discourses around these practices were and are highly political.'[112] Surely this is a natural conclusion to draw given the global context and relevance of these discourses, and particularly within an epoch which has seen the face of power change, according to Nye; witnessing the increasing power of information, which is elemental to the communication industry.[113] The remainder of the book provides a detailed historical analysis of the workings of the BBC Persian Service during the time periods which the authors had established. However the concept of *public diplomacy,* in relation to the workings of the BBC in Iran, is barely touched upon again.

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[110] Taylor, *Global Communications,* p. 18.

[111] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 30.

[112] *ibid.,* p. 30.

[113] Nye, 'Soft Power', pp. 164-166.

Chapter Two - An Assessment of the Archives

Between 1971 and 1977, the BBC came under fire from both the FCO and the Iranian embassy for various broadcasts relating to Iran and the Shah. These years witnessed dramatic changes throughout Iran. The oil price rises of 1971-1973, from $1 a barrel, to $3, and eventually to $11 per barrel, turned into a sudden immense increase in domestic revenue, accounting for 77% of government revenue in 1977, which the Shah pumped straight back into the Iranian economy.[114] Internationally Iran was regarded as the new, emerging 'superpower' of which the Shah was lauded as the 'Emperor of Oil', while countries, such as the US and UK, competed to indulge his ego and thus gain his favour.[115] On the other hand, by 1977 this facade of prosperity was beginning to wear thin as the repercussions of inflation hit, itself a consequence of a failure to provide an institutional framework alongside which steady economic development could occur, which in turn allowed for widespread corruption due to the lack of transparency within government and the judiciary.[116]

In short, the Shah presided over a country which seemed, to those outside of Iran, to be flourishing, and yet the majority of her citizens were floundering. This contradiction of images was of great concern to the Shah, and his ministers worked tirelessly to ensure that it was a positive picture of Iran that was promoted in the international press. This chapter offers a snapshot of the image of Iran put forward by the BBC during these years, and the disputes it frequently became embroiled in as a result of the BBC's insistence on maintaining their editorial independence. In considering these sources chronologically, it is also possible to discern the mounting enmity between the Shah and the BBC.

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[114] Ansari, *Confronting Iran,* p. 61; Fred Halliday, 'The Economic Contradictions', *MERIP Reports,* No. 69 (Jul.- Aug., 1978), p. 9.

[115] 'Iran: Oil, Grandeur and a Challenge to the West', *Time* magazine (4 November, 1974).

[116] Personal lecture notes.

Poetry Festival

In order to mark the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great in 1971, for which the Shah had orchestrated grand festivities for visiting dignitaries and put on an opulent 'show' of Iranian achievements, the BBC likewise arranged various publicities of the events. Their 'main effort' was focused on the holding of a poetry festival, which they tried to establish and promote as a 'literary prize' which would appeal to 'serious poets.'[117] Labeled 'The Cultural Heritage of Iran', the festival attracted contributions from more than one hundred and twenty writers, alongside which the BBCPS broadcast programmes on the life and works of a number of Persian poets.[118] The winner of the event was a Dr. Mehdi Hamidi Shirazi, an already distinguished literary figure by 1971, but who had been embroiled in a bitter debate with Nima Yusij Ali Esfandiari, over his modern-style poetry, since 1946.[119]

Reports on the competition in the Iranian press illustrated two very different views of the competition, and the BBC, but are also exemplary of the fractious literary environment which the BBC had been drawn into due to Hamidi being cast as the victor. A positive article in *Kayhan,* the leading Persian-language conservative newspaper in Iran, details how the winners went to London and were lauded at a reception, attended by Charles Curran, Director General of the BBC, at which Hamidi was called the 'Sovereign of Persian Poetry, a King without throne and without crown, and unofficial Poet-Laureate of Persia.'[120] Significantly, though, the chief editor of *Kayhan,* Abd-al-Rahman Faramarzi, was an active supporter of Hamidi.[121]

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[117] BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC): R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from M. Dodd to Ramsbotham, (3 July 1971).

[118] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Amir Khosrow Afshar to Charles Curran, (9 November 1973).

[119] Jafar Moayyad Shirazi, "Hamidi Sirazi", *Encyclopædia Iranica,* XI/6, pp. 641-643, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hamidi-sirazi (accessed online at 6 June 2014).

[120] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1 - E142: "A. Taheri's Report on Press Cuttings", (15 November 1971).

[121] Shirazi, "Hamidi Sirazi", pp. 641-643, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hamidi-sirazi (accessed online at 6 June 2014).

On the other hand, the Iranian weekly magazine *Firdausi* published an article entitled 'The BBC selects a Poet Laureate for us' which accused the BBC of being out of touch with Iranian literature and selecting a 'second-rate poet' as the winner.[122] In fact, the writer asserts that Hamidi had cheated in submitting a poem which he had compiled some twenty years previously, and thus implores to the 'BBC, which is wont to this kind of creation,...please don't transgress to the area of Poetry, a subject from which Dr. Hamidi has lagged behind, for over 30 or 40 years.'[123] The winning poem, '*Dar amwāj-e Send',* had indeed won first prize in a similar contest in 1951, and Hamidi's success in the BBC competition came about after a further period of intensified confrontation between Hamidi, and his traditional style of poetry, and those advocating 'modern' Persian poetry.[124] In a somewhat goading manner, the article in *Kayhan* had ended with Hamidi 'saying how grateful he is to his opponents and his enemies, as their enmity has been a great motivation for some of his best compositions.'[125]

The British Ambassador in Teheran, Peter Ramsbotham, followed these events up with a letter to the BBC in which he pointed out that the BBC 'seems to be damaging its image by acquiring a reputation for employing and supporting "old brigade" expatriates.'[126] However, this was only a minor criticism and, in general, Ramsbotham seemed to be pleased with the way in which the BBC had helped to mark the occasion. Prior to the proceedings, the Ambassador noted, in a memorandum to Mark Dodd of the BBC, 'with appreciation, what you say about handling things as discretely as you can.'[127] Manifestly, there was much controversy surrounding the lavish celebrations hosted at Persepolis by the Shah. Estimates of its cost ran as high as $600 million,

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[122] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1**:** Telegram from R. Balfour to M. Dodd, (15 November 1971).

[123] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1 - E142: "A. Taheri's Report on Press Cuttings", (15 November 1971).

[124] Jafar Moayyad Shirazi, "Hamidi Sirazi", *Encyclopædia Iranica,* XI/6, pp. 641-643; available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hamidi-sirazi (accessed online at 6 June 2014).

[125] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1 - E142: "A. Taheri's Report on Press Cuttings", (15 November 1971).

[126] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1**:** Telegram from R. Balfour to M. Dodd, (15 November 1971).

[127] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1**:** Telegram from P. Ramsbotham to M. Dodd, (17 July 1971).

while contemporary reports noted the increased poverty in local villages which had felt the impacts of inflation, and suffered further from the government's lack of maintenance of the basic infrastructure.[128] Indeed, the human cost of these celebrations is also stressed in a report from the Middle Eastern Information and Research Project (MERIP), whose authors found that the village which had been at the entrance of the ruins at Persepolis had been moved 30km away, and as such had been removed from their source of income and thus their future looked 'bleak'.[129] Importantly, though, the Middle Eastern Information and Research Project 'provides news and perspectives about the Middle East not available from mainstream news sources', a remark which could be applied to the position held by the BBC.[130] That the BBC had to send out a journalist especially to cover the events of the 2500 year anniversary shows that they did not, by this stage, have a permanent foreign correspondent based in Iran.[131] This would also insinuate that the news which they covered would be very much 'mainstream' given that it was a short, temporary posting.

A letter from Amir Khosrow Afshar, of the Iranian embassy, to Curran attested to the gratitude felt by the Iranian embassy towards the BBC, and the Persian Service in particular, for their part in commemorating the 2500th anniversary, and verifies that the news conveyed by the BBC was in line with the 'official' position. Afshar specifically mentioned the success of the poetry festival which he did not doubt was 'of immense interest to the BBC listeners and augur[ed] well for the Anglo-Iranian friendship and amity.'[132] Letters from Iranian listeners would seem to ratify such a view, with one reading; 'I enjoyed listening to your poetry competition programs, and I

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[128] 'A Celebration of Power', *MERIP Reports,* No. 4 (Nov., 1971), p. 3.

[129] *ibid.*, p. 4.

[130] "Background", *Middle East Research and Information Project,* http://www.merip.org/about#background; (accessed 6 June 2014).

[131] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from M. Dodd to Ramsbotham, (3 July 1971).

[132] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Amir Khosrow Afshar to Charles Curran, (9 November 1973).

appreciate all the hard work put into these programs. Hearing Persian poetry recited so well from the BBC makes me feel very proud.'[133]

It is interesting to consider the impact of the BBC holding a poetry festival, such as has been detailed above, in so much as it becomes clear that the BBC, in putting together content for their foreign broadcasts, went beyond politics and ventured into the cultural and historical realms. Evidently the BBC wished to provide Iranian listeners with news, and content, from within Iran. However the article in *Firdausi* hints at a perception of the BBC as imperialistic and of being somewhat demeaning in the way in which they went about holding the festival and choosing a winner *for* the Iranians. This condemnation of the imperialistic nature of the BBC is a theme which comes up frequently amongst those who wished to disparage the BBC, and the British.

John Bierman

Having sent a special BBC correspondent to cover the 2500 year anniversary celebrations in Iran, by 1972 it was believed requisite to respond to a 'long felt need for more consistent and authoritative news coverage of Iran and adjoining countries for the Persian Service, and for the World Service,' and thus John Bierman was posted to Teheran as a BBC staff correspondent.[134]

By September 1972, Bierman had already appeared on the Shah's radar due to a critical report on the public trial of a guerilla who had killed a policeman which, according to the Shah, was 'manifestly sympathetic to the policeman's murderer.'[135] Even at this stage the British Ambassador, Ramsbotham, notes the Shah's extreme sensitivity to British public criticism, which had reached an 'irrational level in an otherwise extraordinarily well-balanced personality,' and referred to the similar tirade which had occurred prior to the Shah's visit to England in June of the same year.[136]

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[133] FCO 26/728: "BBC Persian Poetry Festival 1971".

[134] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from M. Dodd, (1972).

[135] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from Ramsbotham to FCO, (6 September 1972).

[136] *ibid.*

In order to placate the Shah, the Ambassador came to an agreement on a sort of 'bargain' which he hoped would prevent such emotional outbursts from jeopardizing 'the special position which we [British] have now achieved, including even our prospective defence contracts and trade and investment prospects.'[137] It is worth noting that Ramsbotham directly connects the impact of the media with the potential of British influence in other areas of the Iranian infrastructure.

'Press Wars'

The Shah's ongoing frustration with the BBC continued to grow over the course of 1973 and the month of March witnessed a proliferation of correspondence within the FCO on the matter of British media and Iran. An article in the *Economist,* entitled 'Take it in gulps' and published on Saturday 3 March, had caused particular strife due to the attitude taken in the piece towards the resolution of difficulties within the oil industries of Iraq and Iran.[138] Furthermore, a reference to the Shah as the 'second banana' to Saudi Arabia's Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamini, in addition to mentioning the new deal as something for the Shah 'to brag about when he gets home from his winter holiday in Switzerland' would surely have angered the Shah.[139] A memorandum from Ramsbotham on 8 March remarked that the Iranian government was 'immensely disturbed' with the position taken by the British press and the BBC towards Iran, and referenced the article in the Economist and recent BBC broadcasts as having provoked an editorial in *Kayhan*, on 6 March, commenting on the 'Anti Iranian chorus, with BBC in the lead.'[140] The article suggested that 'alliances between imperialist circles and communists have taken place against Iran in the past', and an editorial in *Mehr-i-Iran,* from the 7 March, also ran along the same lines, carrying the heading

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[137] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from Ramsbotham to FCO, (6 September 1972).

[138] "Take it in gulps." Economist [London, England] 3 Mar. 1973: 78. The Economist Historical Archive, 1843-2010. Web. (Accessed 5 June 2014).

[139] *ibid.*

[140] FCO26/1374 - 13: Ramsbotham, "The British Media on Iran", (8 March 1973); FCO26/1374 - 14: Ramsbotham, "BBC Broadcast', (7 March 1973).

'Wretched voice of Colonialism.'[141] The BBC specifically was also equated with communist clandestine broadcasts against Iran in a 'bitter editorial in the Persian press.'[142]

Clearly Iranians were caught between fears of possible communist Russian encroachment, reflecting the Cold War era in which this study is situated, and also memories of British imperialism which were most obviously manifested around the issue of oil. Yet the BBC's questioning of Iran's purpose in equipping herself with 'expensive modern arms' certainly suggests a somewhat derogatory attitude towards Iran, and would indicate that the editorial policy of the BBC was not always in line with British foreign policy.[143]

While the Iranian government had expressed regret at the publication of the article in *Kayhan,* in addition to conveying that they did not want a "press war", the translation of the original feature in the *Economist*, its issuing as a leaflet in Iran, with a new heading 'What an oil victory', and its circulation within Teheran and amongst provincial universities presented the Iranian government with a problem.[144] Their decision 'not to attack the *Economist* publicly, for fear of drawing more attention to it', and instead to mount 'a diversionary attack' against the BBC, could be viewed as an expression of the Shah's general discontentment with the BBC.[145] That the Shah had delivered 'tirades about the British press and the BBC' to the British Ambassador in both June and September of 1972 is illustrative of his growing exasperation with a foreign institution over which he seemingly had no control, and thus which vexed him even more.[146]

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[141] FCO26/1374 - 14: Ramsbotham, "BBC Broadcast", (7 March 1973).

[142] FCO26/1374 - 16: Ramsbotham, "The British Media on Iran", (13 March 1973).

[143] *ibid.*

[144] FCO26/1374 - 14: Ramsbotham, "The British Media on Iran", (8 March 1973); FCO26/1374 - 16: Ramsbotham, "The British Media on Iran", (13 March 1973).

[145] FCO26/1374 - 16: Ramsbotham, "The British Media on Iran", (13 March 1973).

[146] FCO26/1374 - 24: "Draft brief - British Press and Broadcasting comment on Iran".

Panorama

The most extreme manifestation of the Shah's paranoia with the BBC came in October 1973 when the BBC correspondent in Teheran, John Bierman, was expelled from Iran. The provocation of such action by the Iranian government was an edition of *Panorama*, broadcast in the UK on 1 October, entitled 'Iran: The Barrels and the Guns.'

The programme *Panorama* was originally conceived in 1953 as a 'magazine of informed comment on the contemporary scene' with an emphasis on 'topicality' and 'quality,' in an attempt to explore the possibilities of the new medium of television.[147] A broadcast on current affairs which became 'the TV forum where national issues, political, economic, social were debated...the flagship of the BBC television's journalistic fleet.'[148] The reporters were essential to its success,[149] as they sought to provide viewers with 'a fuller and therefore more accurate story than the News will ever have time or opportunity to do,' but were also hampered by issues of editorial control - a matter which will be returned to in Chapter Three.[150] By the early 1960s, *Panorama* held a weekly Monday night slot on BBC1 television and was drawing a viewership of eight million people.[151] Over the course of its history, the programme has gone through periods of torpidity as well as those of pioneering work in current affairs. Significantly, though, *Panorama* continues to broadcast on BBC television, albeit in a considerably different form to its original concept; evolving in line with the changing world and the corresponding needs of its viewers.[152] *Panorama* perseveres in

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147 Robert Lindley, *Panorama: Fifty Years of Pride and Paranoia* (London, 2002), p. 3.

148 *ibid.,* p. 76.

149 Many of whom have gone on to have exceedingly successful careers in the media.

150 Lindley, *Panorama,* p. 72.

151 *ibid.,* p. 76.

152 *ibid.,* p. 382.

investigating controversies, while itself often being the subject of controversy[153] - the 1 October 1973 edition of the programme is only one in an archive of contentious broadcasts, yet, unfortunately for Bierman and the BBC, this particular case aroused the paranoia of the Shah.

Interestingly, there is little record of the programme 'Iran:The Barrels and the Guns', with only cursory mention of its content within various telegrams, in addition to the information provided in a BBC audience reaction report. Given the vexation it provoked, in both the Iranian and British governments, its salient absence in the archives is striking.[154]

A press log in the BBC written archives from the 4th of October does, however, provide an explanation of the order of events and directives in relation to the news that Bierman had been told to leave Iran. At first the BBC announced that they were 'investigating a news agency report from Teheran that our Correspondent, John Bierman, is being expelled. The BBC has so far received no direct confirmation from the authorities in Teheran. He was due back in Teheran today after reporting trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan.'[155] They later confirmed these reports, adding that Bierman has been 'summoned to the Ministry of Information in Teheran and told that he must leave Iran within three days. No reason was given by the official to whom he spoke and when asked to see the Director of Information he was told that he was not available.'[156] Importantly, the BBC reiterated that Bierman had been on a trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and thus had not actually been in Iran at the time of the broadcast in the UK. Moreover, he had virtually nothing to do with the *Panorama* programme, especially as it was aired on the domestic service.

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[153] Indeed an April 2014 edition of *Panorama,* 'The Mayor and Our Money', has caused people to question both the credibility and investigative methods of the programme; Ian Burrell 'Panorama's attempt to investigate politics in Tower Hamlets has sullied their reputation', *The Independent* (2 July 2014), http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/panoramas-attempt-to-investigate-politics-in-tower-hamlets-has-sullied-their-reputation-9580249.html (accessed online 3 July 2014).

[154] As noted in the introduction, I was limited in several ways in my research and thus more extensive and varied investigation may shed light on additional sources.

[155] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: 'Press Office Log'.

[156] *ibid.*

A note put together by the Managing Director of External Broadcasting on the dispute over the *Panorama* programme offers a number of possible explanations for the Shah's reaction. Significantly it comes to light that the *Panorama* programme provoked a campaign against the BBC which originated with Teheran Radio before being taken up by the whole Iranian press.[157] Accordingly, the *Panorama* broadcast had been viewed by certain opponents of the BBC in Teheran as 'providing a useful pretext for a concerted attack against the BBC and "old colonialists" in the UK.'[158] Regarding this, the campaign was 'designed to place Iran in a favorable light in the eyes of the people, particularly in the Arab world, who might have taken exception to Iran's previously favorable policy towards Israel.'[159] The Shah's authorization of the establishment of an Israeli trade mission in Teheran in the early 1960s is one example of the official Iranian stance regarding Israel; severely contrasting with that of her Arab neighbours.[160] Although this attitude towards Israel was not held by all Iranians, as conversely there were some who identified with Palestinians as fellow victims of British imperialism, due to the British Mandatory period in Palestine.[161] This was the situation against which the Iranian press campaigned, and which the BBC had become inextricably involved through obvious association with Great Britain.

The report continues that the press campaign hoped to place 'Iran firmly in the ranks of Islamic nations which, one Persian newspaper article stated, were united in their condemnation of the BBC's pro-Israel attitude and hostility to Islam.'[162] If this reasoning were the case for Bierman's expelling then it would appear that he was simply the victim in a much broader battle; one which

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[157] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Note on dispute over the Panorama item.'

[158] *ibid.*

[159] *ibid.*

[160] Eric Hooglund, 'Iranian Views of the Arab-Israeli Conflict', *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (1995), p. 89.

[161] Hooglund, 'Iranian Views of the Arab-Israeli Conflict', p. 89.

[162] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Note on dispute over the Panorama item.'

had been launched by the Iranian press against foreign interference. Notably, the BBC Persian Service is also mentioned as having

> 'frequently been a cause of irritation to the Shah in the past...and whose reputation it might have been hoped to damage in the eyes of the listeners through a general attack on the BBC for the slur it was alleged to have cast on Iranian national achievements.'[163]

In reacting in accordance with the press campaign, the Shah would seem to be listening to the will of the Iranian people, while also benefitting himself in the removal of a particular source of anxiety to him, given that Bierman had already proved to be as such - as will be illustrated.

In conformity with this line of reasoning, the memorandum references Bierman's beliefs as to the cause of his being expelled; that the

> 'Panorama row was to enable the Iranians to get rid of him as one of the few foreign correspondents in Teheran at a time when the Shah's Government is facing increasing difficulties due to inflation and shortages and may take increasingly repressive measures against discontent.'[164]

This may have been a reference to the growing hostility towards the regime, and the authority of the Shah, which augmented over the course of the 1970s, and was probably all the more noticeable given the previous decade of relative calm.[165] Indeed the discontent mentioned may have been reference to the guerilla movement, a proliferation of which Abrahamian locates in the Siakal insurrection on 8 February 1971, and whose activity continued until the Islamic Revolution in 1979, causing the Shah considerable concern.[166]

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[163] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Note on dispute over the Panorama item.'

[164] *ibid.*

[165] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 210.

[166] Abrahamian, 'The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963-1977'; "Siāhkal", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2012, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/siahkal (accessed on 3 June 2014).

On the other hand, in a letter to Sir Alec Douglas-Home of the FCO, Curran, Director General of the BBC, expressed his own belief that the Shah was so infuriated by the *Panorama* programme due to the brief reference in the programme to land reform.[167] As has been mentioned, this was a key aspect of the Shah's White Revolution, but an issue over which the Shah was particularly sensitive. The programme of land reform, which entailed the appropriation of land by the government in order to redistribute it to the peasantry, was a development which did not sit well with the landed elite - both secular and clerical.[168] Subsequently land reform was to prove a highly contentious issue for the Shah. In relation to the BBC report though, Curran recognised that 'there is a problem here. If we had missed out all reference to land reform we should have been accused of ignoring a major element of Iranian progress,' and thereby jeopardized the journalistic integrity of the BBC.[169]

The aforementioned memorandum on the *Panorama* affair includes comment on the idea that 'by expelling Bierman the Iranians have also got rid of the *Times* and C.B.C. [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] stringer, Hilary Brown, and are left only with the *Financial Times/ Economist* correspondent, who is already publicly under attack.'[170] The significance of the press as an influential body outside of governmental control has already been assessed, but the existence of foreign media offers even more problems for the ruling establishment as there are fewer ways to reign them in. In the case of the Shah's Iran, this might have seemed even more problematic given that he was keen to concentrate power around his person.[171] The memorandum also explains that the correspondents of the international news agencies who remained in Iran were all Iranian

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[167] FCO26/1374 - 31: Letter from Charles Curran to Alec Douglas Home, 'BBC Overseas Services to Iran', (17 October 1973).

[168] Helmut Richards, 'Land Reform and Agribusiness', *MERIP Reports* (Dec., 1975), p. 3; Avery, *Modern Iran,* p. 502.

[169] FCO26/1374 - 31: Letter from Charles Curran to Alec Douglas Home, 'BBC Overseas Services to Iran', (17 October 1973).

[170] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Note on dispute over the Panorama item.'

[171] Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* p. 160.

nationals 'and therefore easily controlled,'[172] thereby reinforcing the notion that the Shah wanted to be rid of any bodies who resisted or disputed his authority and which were not under his command.

Response of the BBC

The BBC's reaction to the forceful action taken by the Shah was one of compliance, while at the same time staunchly defending the work of their correspondent. The statement proffered by the BBC read as follows;

> 'The BBC has every confidence in the accuracy and impartiality of John Bierman's reporting. This confidence is based not only on his coverage of Iran and neighbouring countries since he took up his present appointment in May 1972, but on his previous work for the BBC at home and abroad.'[173]

Moreover, in reference to the *Panorama* programme itself, it was explained that

> 'The programme included an interview with the Shah at considerable length when he was given every opportunity to answer criticisms made of Iran, together with time to expand his personal philosophy on the ideas behind the policies he has instituted. There is no question of misrepresentation and we are confident that this was an objective assessment of the situation.'[174]

The extent to which the BBC was willing to support both their editorial impartiality, and Bierman, is reflected in a letter to the *Times*, published on 22 October 1973, from Curran, in response to letters to the *Times* from the Iranian Ambassador and Sir James Bowker over the *Panorama* programme. Curran wrote that he deemed the episode of *Panorama* to have given an impression of

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[172] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Note on dispute over the Panorama item.'

[173] *ibid.*

[174] *ibid.*

'major political, social and economic progress under the Shah's leadership.'[175] He continues that he is 'sorry that the Ambassador, reflecting views of his government, should have seen in the *Panorama* evidence of a campaign by the BBC to attack Iranian achievements. That is no part of our intention, and never would be.'[176]

In the same letter, however, Curran also raised the question of 'how to reply to critics who have not themselves seen a programme..?'[177] This comment may have been a surreptitious reference to the revelation that the Shah had ordered the expulsion of Bierman without having viewed the *Panorama* documentary. In a telegram from Ramsbotham to the Managing Director of External Broadcasting, dated 17 October 1973, he commented that the Iranian Court Minister, Alam, had belatedly got the Shah to watch the *Panorama* programme.

> 'Alam himself has admitted to me that the programme, as a whole, was not too bad and certainly that the Shah himself came out of it extremely well. I think the Shah may also have taken this view, though I do not think he will be ready to forgive the BBC for a programme which, undoubtably, contained some deliberately slanted questions and commentaries.'[178]

This information would reinforce the notion that the Shah was more interested in getting Bierman out of his country, rather than being upset with the actual documentary programme. Indeed documents in the BBC written archives from earlier in 1973, and 1972, show that Bierman had been causing the Shah some frustration in his reporting of student troubles and his despatches on the trials of alleged terrorists.[179] In a bulletin from Teheran, on 26 April 1973, Bierman followed up on

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[175] Charles Curran. "BBC documentary on Iran." Times [London, England] 22 Oct. 1973: 15. The Times Digital Archive. (accessed 2 June 2014).

[176] *ibid.*

[177] *ibid.*

[178] BBC WAC: R78/3, 008/1: 'Telegram from Ramsbotham to Managing Director, External Broadcasting', (17 October 1973).

[179] BBC WAC E58/25/1: Mark Dodd, 'John Bierman Under Fire', (9 May 1973); BBC WAC E58/25/1: Mark Dodd, 'The Shah and the BBC', (8 September 1972).

a BBC report of a student demonstration at Tabriz University during which two or three students were said to have died from head injuries after police broke up the demonstration. Bierman quoted the Chancellor of the university; 'Speaking with the utmost vehemence Dr. Zahedi told me that nobody was killed, and nobody was injured, and nobody was arrested. He described the incident as a minor one, and denied that police had been called in from outside...'[180] Bierman then continued to chronicle an account of the incident which he had pieced together from other sources, thereby undermining, and questioning, the words of the Chancellor. The memorandum from David Stride, in Teheran, to the BBC details how, following Bierman's despatches, Stride had been summoned by the Minister of Science and Further Education, Dr. Kazemzadeh, who proceeded to criticize Bierman, 'remarking on his effrontery at doubting the word of the Chancellor of Tabriz University and arguing with him...Dr. Kazemzadeh was shocked that Bierman should have suggested that the Chancellor might not be telling the truth.'[181] Stride finishes by emphasizing that 'on this occasion it was not our broadcasts that were under attack but Bierman himself, his method of collecting information and what was taken to be his disrespectful behaviour towards the Chancellor of Tabriz University.'[182]

The response of Mark Dodd, head of External Services, to Stride's report illustrates the faith the BBC had in their staff, and their resolution to uphold the quality and standards of journalism upon which their profession was based. Dodd writes that he felt 'Bierman is absolutely right to stick to his guns if he is as confident, as he appears to be, of his sources,' but noted that Bierman was 'going to come under increasing pressure.'[183] The exchange of telegrams surrounding this controversy illustrates the framework within which the BBC and its reporters had to work due to their position as a foreign institution, but also touches upon the problems which the Iranian

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[180] BBC WAC E58/25/1: David Stride, 'Student Unrest at Tabriz University', (7 May 1973).

[181] *ibid.*

[182] *ibid.*

[183] BBC WAC E58/25/1: Mark Dodd, 'John Bierman Under Fire', (9 May 1973).

authorities had in relation to foreign media. The aforementioned letter from Curran to the *Times,* after the *Panorama* incident in October 1973, succinctly appraises the difficulties faced by BBC external services by suggesting that the question to be considered as regards the *Panorama* issue was 'should programmes be prepared in order to please those whom they are reporting, or in order to illuminate the situation for those to whom they are addressed?'[184]

Magnified criticism

That sources in the FCO and BBC written archives tend to refer only to broadcasts and publications which upset the Shah is testament to the idea that his ministers and officials were inclined to 'serve up to him the bad but omit to tell him about the good' thereby proliferating his sensitivity to criticism in the press.[185]

Indeed it appears that the British FCO made a concerted effort to deliver proof of favourable British reporting of Iran to the Shah. For example in December 1973, a memo from Ramsbotham details a request from the Iranian Prime Minister for the text of a broadcast about Iran by Peter Avery, lecturer in Persian Studies and Fellow at King's College, Cambridge, which he deemed 'excellent' and wanted to show the Shah.[186] Aired on the BBC Overseas Services on 1 December 1973, the programme, entitled 'Iran: Oil and the Shah's Arab Neighbours', described Iranian armaments, renewed relations between Iran and Iraq, and the Shah's understanding of Iran's position in relation to Saudi Arabia and oil.[187] Relatedly, Avery referred to Iran as 'the West's hope of stability and good sense in its Middle Eastern reservoir of energy', and remarked that 'the Shah has made it clear that he follows nobody [and] has no need to.'[188] The FCO did not miss the chance

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[184] Charles Curran. "BBC documentary on Iran." Times [London, England] 22 Oct. 1973: 15. The Times Digital Archive. (accessed 2 June 2014).

[185] FCO26/1374 - 19: Leahy to Douglas-Home, "British press comment on Iran", (14 March 1973).

[186] FCO26/1374 - 34: Ramsbotham to immediate FCO, (2 December 1973).

[187] FCO26/1374 - 35: "Central Current Affairs Talks External Broadcasting", (1 December 1973).

[188] *ibid.*

to emphasize this flattery of the Shah, and perhaps an attempt to repair the straining of relations following the *Panorama* affair.

Moreover, the broadcast also referenced the Irano-British investment talks which were taking place in Teheran, and commented that 'particularly now must Britain welcome Iran's international initiative.'[189] In this instance, it might be argued that the British FCO was using the BBC to corroborate, and strengthen, the friendly stance taken by the British towards Iran. An FCO document, entitled 'Post Mortem on Iran,' which dealt with British policy in Iran in the 1970s, clearly outlined the basis of the British relationship with the Shah during the 1970s, stating that;

> 'The Shah's pro-Western stance and the oil wealth offered us major opportunities. The decision taken in 1969 to end our established treaty relationships with the Gulf States by the end of 1971 made it important for us to cultivate Iran...We also secured major commercial benefits. It was understandable therefore, that Ministers took the view that we should support the Shah warts and all.'[190]

A letter from Peter Westmacott, of the Middle East Department in the British government, to David Miers, of the FCO, further accentuates that the UK 'undoubtably flattered and humoured the Shah - perhaps excessively' during the 1970s, as did other countries.[191] Westmacott adds that 'unfortunately, the UK needed the Shah more than the Shah thought he needed the UK.'[192] And thus, when relations between the two countries were soured, in this case due to an act by the BBC, the delicately balanced partnership between the FCO and the BBC came under scrutiny from all sides.

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[189] FCO26/1374 - 35: "Central Current Affairs Talks External Broadcasting", (1 December 1973).

[190] FCO8/4029: 'British policy in Iran 1974-1978'.

[191] FCO8/4029 - 13A: Peter Westmacott to David Miers, (24 April 1981).

[192] *ibid.*

A Delicate Balance

In relation to the Irano-British investment conference, mentioned above, it is interesting to note that the BBC did not send anyone to cover it. The talks took place in Teheran in November 1973, two months after Bierman had been expelled from Iran. While the Shah and Iranian government had by this point come to agree that the episode of *Panorama* had been 'a good programme of some propaganda value to Iran' and 'probably regret[ed] their hasty action' in exiling Bierman, it was noted that the BBC was still feeling 'understandably sore' over the matter.[193] Evidently, the BBC felt that their journalistic credibility had been undermined, and they had also not been backed by the FCO over the issue. Indeed members of the British government realized that there was little they could do to influence the British press,[194] and in a controversial situation, such as that surrounding the *Panorama* affair, the distance between the BBC and the FCO was best observed in order to maintain amicable official relations between Britain and Iran.

On the other hand, it was also understood that the BBC was undeniably woven into the 'face' of the British presence abroad, and thus the campaign against the BBC in Iran, after the airing of *Panorama* on 1 October, was seen as also being indirectly hostile towards the British government; a matter which necessitated FCO involvement.[195]

Possible 'end' of the Persian Service

A BBC Persian Service broadcast on 21 June 1976, summarizing a survey on Iran which had been published in the *Financial Times,* once again upset the Shah and led to renewed debate over the value of the Persian Service. The radio presenter explained that the article had referred to 'doubts as to the industrial capacity of Iran, and its competitiveness in the sphere of exports, which

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193 FCO26/1374 - 2/41: D J Makinson to Bambury, 'Proposed CENTO conference on broadcasting and TV exchanges', (18 December 1973).

194 FCO26/1374 - 24: "Draft brief - British Press and Broadcasting comment on Iran".

195 BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Ramsbotham to Managing Director of External Broadcasting, (17 October 1973).

is the Shah's real aim,' as well as referencing the low level of agricultural production, and the ever-widening gap between the rich and poor - all sensitive issues for the Shah.[196] The BBC maintained that their summary of the article was both reasonable and balanced, however they did come to accept that the Shah would be more worried about a broadcast in Persian to a widespread audience than about material in an English newspaper.[197]

Significantly, this particular case seems to have led to a full-scale examination by the FCO of the benefit of the Persian Service, which included consideration of 'whether it should be altered in any way or indeed abolished altogether.'[198] The British Ambassador in Teheran at the time, Sir Anthony Parsons, provided his own detailed assessment of the Persian Service which came down conclusively in favour of discontinuing the service. He highlighted that it was 'well known that the vernacular service is financed by the FCO and is therefore firmly considered by the Iranians as an official organ of the government.'[199] In fact he is somewhat disparaging of the BBCPS, recounting that it 'will never be considered as other than a propaganda organ of HMG[200], innocuous most of the time, irritating some of the time, and downright malevolent toward the Iranian government and its policies and aspirations on occasions.'[201] Clearly, Parsons often found the BBCPS an irritation in terms of maintaing amicable diplomatic relations between the two countries. He was not however against the BBC in general, as he considered the BBC World Service to be the 'most powerful single information tool', it was just the Persian Service which he had a problem with.[202]

Nicholas Barrington, of the FCO, expressed his surprise at the nature and strength of Parsons views on the BBCPS, and assessed that the BBC would recognise them as 'an example of

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196 FCO 8/2762: Telegram of full text of item in Persian Service Current Affairs, (31 June 1976).

197 FCO 8/2762**:** "The Financial Times Survey on Iran and the BBC Persian Service Report", (1 July 1976).

198 FCO 8/2762**:** Telegram re-BBC Persian Service, (5 July 1976).

199 FCO 8/2762: Telegram from A Parsons to N J Barrington on "BBC Persian Service", (4 July 1976).

200 'Her Majesty's Government', referring to the British government.

201 FCO 8/2762: Telegram from A Parsons to N J Barrington on "BBC Persian Service", (4 July 1976).

202 *ibid.*

the FCO's concern with short-term political expediency which they find inhibiting to the much longer-term aims of external broadcasting.'[203] The documents surrounding this FCO review of the Persian Service offer a particularly useful insight into the web of views and partnerships which existed between the FCO and the BBC, and will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.

Continued Paranoia

Evidently, the FCO concluded that the BBCPS was of some use, and the service continued to function as before.[204] Yet less than a year later an episode of 'PM Reports'[205] aired on Radio 4 in the UK, on 27 February 1977, caused further controversy and an exchange of telegrams between the FCO and the BBC ensued. During the course of the programme, Brian Widlake had interviewed Margaret Laing on her new biography of the Shah.[206] The key issue for the Iranian embassy, however, was not the book, but the description, by Widlake, of the Shah as running 'a country which is one of the most repressive regimes in the world, a formidable police state.'[207] In another letter, written directly to Curran, the Iranian Ambassador was unequivocal in stating the Iranian government's dissatisfaction with the BBC; 'The patent prejudice of the interviewer makes ludicrous any pretense of impartiality which one is constantly reminded are the hallmarks of the BBC's policy as a public corporation.'[208]

This dialogue is particularly notable in that it was over a domestic broadcast, and as Wilson notes, this was 'the first time [he had] been hauled over the coals about a Home Service

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[203] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from N J Barrington to A Parsons, (20 July 1976).

[204] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from N J Barrington 'The BBC Persian Service', (14 June 1976).

[205] BBC Radio 4's early evening news and current affairs programme which began in 1970.

[206] Margaret Irene Laing, *The Shah,* (1977).

[207] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from W E H Whyte to N M Wilson, (24 March 1977).

[208] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Parviz C. Radji to Charles Curran, (17 March 1977).

broadcast.'[209] As such, it would appear that the Shah's paranoia with the foreign press was as rife as ever.

Another Panorama Episode

On 2 May, 1977, the *Panorama* team once again turned their gaze on Iran. This time, amidst David Dimbleby's interview with the American President Jimmy Carter, the matter of human rights in Iran came up - an issue which had been brewing throughout the 1970s but came to the forefront of the political stage through Carter's election platform.[210] The Iranian Ambassador, Parviz Radji, wrote to Charles Curran making plain the exasperation felt by the Iranian embassy towards the BBC by this point. Radji admonished that 'the presupposition of Iran's guilt of infringing basic human rights...which was so clearly insinuated by the unworthy example of your interviewer, provides yet another instance of the BBC's undisguised, not to say gratuitous, hostility towards Iran.'[211] He continues to express, in a third letter in the series, that the Iranian embassy desired 'an explanation as to why Iran was isolated for a series of questions on human rights which, by their nature and the persistence with which they were put, were palpably intended to taint Iran's image before millions of viewers.'[212] Given the Shah's acknowledged obsession with how he was perceived by the West, this would clearly have been of great concern to him.

Interestingly, an article in the *Times,* published on 9 May 1977, written by Lord Chalfont, who had recently returned from a trip to Iran, commented on the presence of a delegation from the International Red Cross who were there inspecting Iranian prisons, 'although you would have to search the press of the western world with a powerful telescope to detect any mention of it.'[213] This

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[209] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from W E H Whyte to N M Wilson, (24 March 1977).

[210] Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution,* pp. 12-15.

[211] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Parviz C. Radji to Charles Curran, (9 May 1977).

[212] *ibid.*

[213] Lord Chalfont, 'The double standard of 'human rights", *The Times* (9 May, 1977(, p. 14.

remark would seem to indicate that the European and American press were, to some extent, pursuing a favourable editorial policy towards Iran, perhaps at the bequest of their various governments who, in the majority, were keen to mollify Iran. Indeed an *MERIP* report, from August 1977, observed that while the new Carter administration in the US had declared a policy of 'advancing the cause of human rights throughout the world', there had been a 'determination to ignore or cover up violations of human rights perpetrated by the allies of the US', of which Iran was one.[214] This might help to explain the displeasure communicated by Radji over what was perceived as 'the entrenched attitude of hostility towards Iran demonstrated by the BBC...which my government has occasion to note with great regret and will bear in mind,' especially given that the press in other countries appeared to be accepting the Iranian official line.[215] The US press, for instance, and especially the *New York Times,* treated 'government press releases as hard news' and repeated 'court propaganda with few reservations', and thus the Iranian embassy could not seem to understand why the BBC was not doing the same.[216]

That Curran's response refers to the favourable light in which Iran, and her interests, had been reflected in recent BBC programmes, and that he 'should not wish to see that picture changed', does seem to support the idea, however, that there existed some sort of policy which sought to pacify Iran.[217] The Iranian oil boom of 1973-77 had certainly led to an increased interest from Western countries in Iran and, for the remainder of the decade - until the revolution of 1979 - the Iranian regime predominantly served the interests of 'foreign investors, comprador capitalists, and Western imperialists', to the despair of Iranian society.[218] This international situation in which Iran, and her oil deposits, were embroiled surely played a significant part in the line taken by

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[214] 'Carter Appoints "Field Marshall" Sullivan Ambassador to Shah', *MERIP Reports,* No. 59 (Aug., 1977), p. 24.

[215] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Parviz C. Radji to Charles Curran, (19 May 1977).

[216] Ervand Abrahamian, 'The Political Challenge', *MERIP Reports,* No. 69 (July - Aug., 1978), p. 3.

[217] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Letter from Charles Curran to Parviz C. Radji, (20 May 1977).

[218] Abrahamian, 'The Political Challenge', pp. 3-4.

Western commentators on the state of affairs in Iran. Her oil seemed to have bought her both an increased GNP[219] and a free pass from criticism in the Western press. Thus when the BBC broke from this mold, the Iranian embassy was less than impressed.

[219] Gross National Product; 'Between 1964-1978, Iran's GNP grew at an annual rate of 13.2% at constant prices'; Glenn E. Curtis and Eric Hooglund (eds.), *Iran: a country study* (2008), http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/pdf/CS_Iran.pdf, p. 148 (accessed online 4 July 2014).

Chapter Three - A Synthesis of Ideas

This chapter will predominantly provide a synthesis of the previous two chapters, and thereby attempt to provide some sort of answers to the questions put forward in the introduction. A closer examination of the actual audience of the BBCPS, for instance, allows us to view the issue of the BBC's influence in Iran from another angle. Analysis of the FCO review of the BBCPS, which took place in 1976, also provides details which help to elucidate the differences in policy between the two organisations. The perspectives offered through such analyses provide a fuller picture of the situation in which the BBCPS functioned, and thus make it somewhat easier to approach the issue of the dynamic which existed between the FCO and the BBC in Iran, and in turn to question the response and attitude of the Shah to this state of affairs. In turn, the second part of this chapter will try to explain the usefulness of viewing the research undertaken in this study within the theoretical framework of the *Fourth Estate,* an alternative to that of *public diplomacy* and *soft power* used in *The Persian Service,* the work reviewed briefly earlier on in this study.

Audience of the Persian Service

Surveys of the BBC Persian Service, undertaken by the National Institute of Psychology, Teheran, in 1965 and 1969/70 for the BBC, significantly undermine the Shah's belief in the widespread influence of the BBCPS. In the first place, the 1969/70 review of the service found that it had a regular audience of 4% and a total audience of 9%.[220] It is important to note that this figure only pertains to literate male adults (no other details of these specifications are given) who lived in homes with access to a radio in and around Teheran, Kerman, Isfahan and Abadan.[221] The 1965 survey also covered Tabriz and Shiraz. The figures for regular listeners were far higher in the cities

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[220] FCO 8/2762: Review of the BBC Persian Service, (July 1976).

[221] *ibid.*

outside of Teheran, and particularly in Abadan where 36% of the respondents claimed to listen to the BBCPS regularly or irregularly.[222] This figure is probably not so surprising when taking into account that a considerable proportion of those living in Abadan were expatriates who worked for the oil companies. It is also interesting to note that British expatriates were a 'very low priority audience' according to the FCO, and therefore that the highest recorded listenership of the BBCPS probably included a high proportion of expatriates is indicative that the BBCPS was not fulfilling FCO strategies.[223] Some years later, in late 1974, a United States Intelligence Agency (USIA)-sponsored survey also indicated, in its preliminary findings, that only around 1.5% of 'urban respondents' listened at least once a week thereby insinuating that the listenership was not increasing in any obvious manner over the time period covered in this study.[224]

While these surveys clearly do not provide the full picture; they do not allow for female or non-literate listeners and only cover inhabitants of the major cities/towns, they do suggest that the proportion of Iranians who listened regularly to the BBCPS was somewhat limited. However, according to Cyrus Ramtin, a senior official of National Iranian Radio & Television, audience research in 1975 had shown that listeners were more numerous for the BBCPS than any other foreign station broadcasting in Persian.[225] Indeed where the BBCPS had had a regular audience of 4% in 1969/70, the Soviet station, Radio Teheran, had only 1% of regular listeners.[226] These comparative figures would suggest that the BBC was winning the battle over foreign news hegemony in Iran, as referred to in the first chapter of this study, but that their influence was far more limited than the outbursts of the Shah would lead us to believe.

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[222] FCO 8/2762: Review of the BBC Persian Service, (July 1976).

[223] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from N J Barrington to Sir A D Parsons on "BBC Persian Service", (20 July 1976).

[224] FCO 8/2762: Review of the BBC Persian Service, (July 1976).

[225] *ibid.*

[226] *ibid.*

In Sir Anthony Parsons' memorandum on the Persian Service, to Nicholas Barrington of the FCO, the Ambassador corroborated this view, commenting that during his extensive travel of the Iranian provinces 'none of the Persians [he had] met have ever raised the subject of the Persian Service.'[227] While this evidence is not conclusive, of course there may have been no reason to bring up the BBCPS in conversation with the Ambassador, it does nonetheless, in combination with the figures from the surveys, continue to suggest that the number of people actually listening to BBCPS broadcasts was relatively small. Moreover the issue of 'unscreened industrial electrical interference' is mentioned a number of times, proving to be particularly bad in Teheran, and the Chief Engineer of the BBC External Services agreed that the signal 'left much to be desired' for the ordinary listener in Iran.[228] Such grievances might also lessen the listenership.

While we do not have audience figures for specific BBCPS broadcasts, which would provide a far clearer indication of the potential influence of the BBC in Iran, the numbers which emerge from the aforementioned surveys do suggest that the paranoia of the Shah was unjustified. Instead, a comment in a document entitled 'A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular' which reads 'the Persian Service comes from time to time into conflict with the Shah and his government though there is little to suggest that these irritations are shared by our listeners' seems to offer a more valid and rational evaluation.[229] This view is also substantiated through consideration of the content broadcast by the BBC across a wider timescale, such as between 1971-77, in comparison to focusing on specific 'moments' which are historically significant due to other political implications, and which the periods researched in the *Tuning In* project could be accused of being.

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[227] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from A Parsons to N J Barrington on "BBC Persian Service", (4 July 1976).

[228] FCO 8/2762: Review of the BBC Persian Service, (July 1976).

[229] BBC WAC E40/711/2 - B45XB58 - 4 - 1: 'Review of Persian Service', "A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular".

A Divergence in Policies

A document in the BBC written archives, referred to above, entitled 'A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular', describes the outcomes of the review of the Persian Service. A number of issues, over which the FCO and the BBC were at odds with one another, are highlighted, in turn helping to expound the relationship between the two institutions in relation to the BBCPS. Firstly, the BBC viewed its external services as an 'instrument of long-term influence' which set it apart from other government information work.[230] The views expressed by Anthony Parsons, regarding the Persian Service, on the other hand exemplified 'the short-term political expediency' of the FCO which the BBC found particularly inhibiting.[231] Thus there was an apparent, and fundamental, difference of interests from the start, relating to who the target audience was and what the goals of British intervention in Iran were.

Relatedly the review highlights the emergence of a new economic and educated class in Iran; who are 'hungry for ideas and information' for which they primarily have to turn to foreign radio.[232] While acknowledging that Iran was a country of 'strategic importance' to Britain, as was discussed in the first chapter in terms of the loose alliance versus Soviet expansion, and held a significant economic potential for the British, the review does not directly link these British interests to the pursuit of an obvious media policy, in the manner of public diplomacy.[233] This is in contrast to the views of Peter Ramsbotham, the British Ambassador to Iran between 1971-1973, which were noted in chapter two. Instead, the review emphasizes the potential impact of a 'free' press. The restrictions of the dissemination of news, and expression of ideas, in the Iranian system meant that there was a market hungry for something the BBC could offer; 'a free voice speaking

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[230] BBC WAC E40/711/2 - B45XB58 - 4 - 1: 'Review of Persian Service', "A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular".

[231] FCO 8/2762: Telegram from N J Barrington to Sir A D Parsons on "BBC Persian Service", (20 July 1976).

[232] BBC WAC E40/711/2 - B45XB58 - 4 - 1: 'Review of Persian Service', "A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular".

[233] *ibid.*

with integrity.'[234] And it was over this point that the FCO and BBC surely faced a struggle as the BBC might have perceived directives from the FCO as impeding the editorial freedom which was so highly valued, while at the same time the FCO could argue that BBC broadcasts which ran counter to British foreign policy were surely undermining the integrity of the British image.

Finally the review, which argued in favour of the case of the BBCPS, refuted the argument that the BBCWS was of far more use to the British government, put forward by Parsons, given that British Council estimates suggested that only around 2% of the Iranian population spoke English to a reasonable standard, and thereby could listen to, and understand, the BBCWS.[235] As has already been mentioned, it was the Iranians, not foreign expatriates, who the FCO wished to target, and possibly influence. Therefore in order to reach the maximum audience, it was clearly necessary to broadcast in the vernacular language, which the BBCPS did.

The assessment of FCO sources provided in chapter two, in conjunction with the above evaluation, would suggest that the partnership between the FCO and the BBC, in relation to the BBCPS, was one in which the FCO wanted the BBC on their side, more than the BBC thought they needed the FCO. In point of fact, if the BBC external services had not been bound to the FCO for financial reasons, then the BBC may have felt few obligations to the FCO. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the BBC were against the FCO by any means; their editorial policy and content still represented a British point of view, but they did not view British foreign policy as the guidelines for their own broadcasting policy.

Beholden to Principles

In light of such an appraisal, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Shah's frustration with the BBC was relatively futile. An exchange between Ellingworth, of the British Embassy in

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[234] BBC WAC E40/711/2 - B45XB58 - 4 - 1: 'Review of Persian Service', "A Brief Case for External Broadcasting and the BBC Persian Service in Particular".

[235] *ibid.*

Teheran, and Nadim, Head of the Minister's Secretariat, was related in a letter from Ellingworth to the Middle East Department of the FCO in London, and is worth quoting;

> 'There then followed a discussion in which we went over the usual ground about the position of the BBC...Nadim said that he hoped we would "put an end" to the sort of incident about which he had complained. I said that although I would report what he had told me, I could not possibly undertake this on anybody's behalf. I was sure the FCO would also regret any adverse effects such broadcasts might have, but Nadim must know that we did not control the BBC.'[236]

This was the manner in which the two organizations were affiliated, with each aware of the others positions and views, but at the same time beholden to their own principles. In late 1978, David Owen, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, wrote to Sir Michael Swann, Chairman of the BBC;

> 'As you know, I am a strong believer in the independence of the BBC and of the value of the BBC's external broadcasts. I have therefore been scrupulous about defending your independence at all stages. I believe it would be gravely damaging to the long term futures of Britain's standing in the world if there was to be an attempt at governmental interferences.'

That Owen wrote this at a time when the situation in Iran was fast deteriorating, particularly in relation to British interests, is exemplary of the consistency in the approach of the FCO towards the BBC, despite their frequent differences. Moreover, Owen's assertion of the independence of the BBC, truly reveals that it was the BBC who were calling the shots on their own work.

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[236] BBC WAC E58/25/1: R. H. Ellingworth to Patrick Wright, 'Persian Complaints - Part One', (18 May 1973).

The Persian Service as a member of the *Fourth Estate*

In light of the above assessment, it could be suggested that it is more appropriate to situate the BBCPS within the framework of the *Fourth Estate,* rather than see it as a tool of public diplomacy. After all, as the sources referenced in this study have illustrated, the British FCO did not *control* the BBC; it could only express its frustration with the organization. And so, in accordance with the idea of the *Fourth Estate,* if the work of the BBCPS is positioned within the structure of the media, rather than that of the government which the concept of *public diplomacy* implies, the BBCPS is viewed through an entirely different lens.

The media, then, in its own right, has a number of responsibilities, described by Charles W. Bray in 1974 as being threefold; to cover the breaking of a story, to investigate, and to reflect.[237] The first of these entails the obvious reporting of news, but it is the second two responsibilities which are perhaps most interesting to consider, and also most relevant to the case studies offered in the previous chapter. In the first place, the investigative nature of reporting, such as that demonstrated by John Bierman during the student strikes in Teheran in 1972, requires questioning everything and everyone in order to discern the truth. Even more so, it entails attempting to refute all one is told until it is proven to be verifiable. Naturally, such methods of reporting are intrusive, and thus, in a country such as Iran in the 1970s, would cause the government considerable grievances. As has been discussed previously, in the 1970s various groups were posing a challenge to the authority of the Shah. If foreign media also appeared to be questioning the Shah's control, as the Shah believed to be the case, then this was a further worry for the Shah. Thus he monitored the foreign press with a vigilant eye, just as with the Iranian media, which faced heavy censorship. He simply could not afford to have another group in opposition, especially given the potential widespread form of the medium and its capacity to influence - both at home and abroad.

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[237] Charles W. Bray, 'The Media and Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy,* No. 16 (1974), p. 117.

This thought on influence brings us to the last of the three responsibilities of the media outlined by Bray; the need to reflect. By this he suggests that it is the role of the media to record and convey the views of the public.[238] Thus instead of simply commentating on affairs of the state for the public to digest, the media should also communicate the ideas of the people to the government (something the BBCPS might claim it was doing in its extensive reporting of opposition to the Shah in the months leading up to the revolution in early 1979); thereby promoting multi-directional communication instead of simply being a top-down process. A notion which would not sit well with the Shah's increasing centralization of power, itself a one-way system. And this leads us succinctly back to the idea of the *Fourth Estate,* as elucidated by Carlyle, and the hypothesis that governments across the globe had been attempting to combat the influence of the press for the preceding century; the challenge faced by the Shah was not a new one.[239]

First consider the hierarchy implicit in the relationship between the first three estates; the nobility, the clergy and the remainder of the population. Each group has its established place in society, and understands who wields authority over whom. (While this is predominantly relevant to medieval and early modern European states, the idea can be expounded to be applicable to other nations - the case of Iran being one such country given the separation between the monarchy, the clerics and the commoners - the *bazaari* being the additional group.)[240] Then contemplate the position of the press - the *fourth estate* - within this hierarchy; there is no obvious place for it. It seems to sit beyond the other three categories of society; representative of them all, but beholden to none.

Now the repetition of Carlyle's words is necessary to explicate the position enjoyed by the press; 'Whoever can speak, speaking now to a whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of

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[238] Charles W. Bray, 'The Media and Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy,* No. 16 (1974), p. 114.

[239] Carlyle, Lecture V. 'The Hero as man of Letters'.

[240] Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (2008), p. 140.

government.'[241] So the press, as the fourth estate, wields a power of its own and yet is duty-bound only by the principles of its profession.[242] Moreover, while the media is clearly not a branch of government *per se*, that it is equated to being one is illustrative of its position *vis a vis* the government; the key difference between the two being that a government is elected, in some form, and has legislative powers whereas the the media is self-appointed and commands a largely illusory power - albeit one which can have momentous effects.

Where, then, does the evaluation of the BBC Persian Service fit in relation to this framework of the *Fourth Estate*? Essentially, the Shah became infuriated with the ability of the BBCPS to exercise its influence given its nature as a media organization.[243] However, given that the BBCPS was a foreign institution, the Shah could not impose the same restrictions on it as he had done with the Iranian press. This was ever more so the case due to the Shah's political alliance with Great Britain, and this is where the British FCO became tied up in the web of communications.[244]

This analysis does not rule out the possibility of the BBCPS functioning as an aspect of the programme of public diplomacy conducted by the British FCO. However if we view the BBCPS solely in this manner, then we are, to an extent, legitimating the Shah's claim that the BBCPS was a 'tool' of the British government. If, on the other hand, we acknowledge that the BBCPS is first and foremost a media institution, and therefore locate the work of the BBCPS within the framework of the *Fourth Estate*, as I have attempted to do in this study, then it becomes apparent that the contentious relationships which developed between the BBC, the FCO, and the Shah, in relation to

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[241] Carlyle, Lecture V. 'The Hero as man of Letters'.

[242] The Pew Research Center's Journalism Project provides a useful list of the 'Principles of Journalism' put together at the end of the twentieth century. The first principle, according to their research, is journalism's obligation to the truth, http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles-of-journalism/ (accessed 8 July 2014).

[243] The Iranian Court Minister, Alam, is recorded as referring to "Britain's very real ability, even today, to lynch governments. The BBC, funded by the Foreign Office, interprets the news as it sees fit. And when the BBC speaks, the people of Iran and the rest of the Middle East listen." Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 13.

[244] BBC WAC R78/3, 008/1: Telegram from Ramsbotham to FCO, (6 September 1972).

the BBCPS, are exemplary of the precarious balance between the British press and government which has required consistent surveillance since the beginnings of the popular press in the late nineteenth century. However, given the restrictions placed on the Iranian press, the Shah did not know how to deal with the independence of the foreign media. His paranoia over his increasingly fragile position only augmented his frustration with this seemingly recalcitrant organization.

A final comment is necessary to reiterate the idea that within both of the theoretical frameworks mentioned, the media is interlinked with government, and indeed it is futile to consider them otherwise. Perhaps this is really the fundamental issue which the Shah did not seem to grasp; that from its foundation, the press (and later media) was intent on 'checking' governmental authority on the behalf of the people; its 'electorate' if you like. As Bray astutely remarked in 1974, 'in the final analysis, government and media are as interdependent as the rest of the world, and it will do no good for either party to tell the other that his end of the boat is sinking; it may do some good to suggest to both that they start bailing.'[245]

[245] Charles W. Bray, 'The Media and Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy,* No. 16 (1974), pp. 114-115.

Conclusion

An issue of Power

A consideration of the sources detailing the interaction between the BBC, the FCO and the Iranian government between 1971-1977, as was outlined in the previous chapters, brings into focus the question of power; in what forms did it exist? And who was wielding it?

The Shah was certainly fighting a number of battles, both domestically and internationally, which, notably, all seemed to center around the desire for influence within Iran, of which the Shah held considerably little. This acquisition of power was of particular importance to the Shah given that the first half of his reign was marred with the event of the 1953 coup, which had been deemed necessary in order to re-instate his rule. This was certainly a situation which the Shah was anxious to avoid again at all costs; sacrifices which were met by the Iranian populace as the Shah 'effectively dismantled the Constitutional infrastructure he had inherited.'[246] The extent of this process meant that by the 1970s 'the national ideal was invested in a single individual who identified himself with the reified nation known as 'Iran'.'[247] However, in the course of concentrating power in his person, the Shah became oversuspicious of any possible threat to his position.

Importantly, the Shah's struggle for authority should be contextualized in relation to the international scene which was witnessing growing decentralization; particularly in the West where countries were seeing power increasingly invested in intra-national bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). Thus the work of the BBC in Iran, particularly as regards cultural programmes such as those accompanying the Poetry Festival in 1971, might not have been viewed as drastically by the FCO as it was by the Shah. However the animosity of the Shah towards the

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[246] Reference to the Constitutional Era of the early twentieth century; the constitutional revolution of 1906 witnessed the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty, and it was on this constitutional 'tide' that Reza Khan came to power in 1921; Ansari, *Nationalism in Iran,* p. 183.

[247] Ansari, *Politics and Nationalism in Iran,* p. 183.

BBC, and the favourable attitude of the British towards the Shah, meant that there naturally emerged contention between the BBC and the FCO.

Thus to frame the relationship between the BBC and the FCO in the terms of *public diplomacy* seems to miss the dimension of the political reality that existed. If the BBCPS was really a tool of public diplomacy, then it would, for the most part, have been pursuing an editorial policy agreed upon by the FCO. Instead, the extent of complaints by the FCO which were centered around BBC content would lead us to believe that the FCO did not have as firm a grip on the BBC as it might have wished, particularly given that it financed the BBC external services. Sreberny and Torfeh identify that the ambiguous nature of the relationship between the FCO and the BBCPS depended on the circumstance and on the people in charge.[248] However, given such a vague and changing partnership, it seems bold to try and place the relationship within the framework of *public diplomacy*, particularly as this would suggest that there existed some linear form of communication; starting from within the offices of the British government, and ending in the Iranian audience, but with the BBCPS playing an intermediary, while also essential, role.

Who, how, why?

Relatedly, an analysis of the audience of the BBCPS, as has been outlined in chapter three of this study, is crucial in order to gauge the real impact of the service. Access was a key factor, the figures from the surveys denoting that only a fraction of the Iranian population were actually able to listen to the radio. As was touched upon earlier, the evolution of technology was not a wholly inclusive process. Moreover, given that we can deduce that the ownership of a radio might have been deemed something of a luxury, it therefore seems equally reasonable to suggest that those who possessed the technology to listen to the BBCPS broadcasts would have been from the upper echelons of Iranian society, or at least those with some monetary wealth. Notably, this 'category' of

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[248] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service,* p. 171.

people would have been those who the Shah would have been most likely to interact with; and therefore a probable source of the Shah's paranoia. It has been noted that the Shah's ministers actively provided the Shah with favourable excerpts from BBCPS content. Perhaps it is also possible to garner from this activity that the Shah would have received information predominantly from advisors close to him, again people who would in all likelihood have had access to a radio, and therefore representatives of that small segment of the Iranian populace who listened to the BBCPS. Through such analysis, it is possible to locate the source of the Shah's paranoia; his attempts to centralize Iranian bureaucracy around himself seemed to simultaneously exaggerate issues which he now sought to control.

Further research might also question the reasons for which listeners of the BBCPS turned on their radios in the first place. Indeed a thorough examination of the Iranian domestic media services and press may proffer the idea that those Iranians who turned to the BBCPS as their source of news did so due to the dearth of information available to them in any other form, resulting from strict censorship rules.[249] Surely this is an important answer to the question of why people listened to the BBCPS. Moreover, this explanation also goes part way to accounting for the influence the BBC was perceived to have; it was almost the only institution which functioned outside of the Shah's control and yet which the Iranian people had access to.

The Corporation of the Goosequill[250]

Accordingly, the analytical framework offered by the concept of the *Fourth Estate* seems fitting for the role played by the BBC in Iran during the 1970s. Indeed given Sreberny and Torfeh's reference to the perception of independent actors as 'fifth-columnists by foreign powers' at the end

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[249] Parvaz, 'Cambridge project: Iran's press censorship', http://dparvaz.wordpress.com/familiar-beast-press-censorship-in-iran/ (accessed 2 August 2014).

[250] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis,* Chapter 19 (1848-1850), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7265/7265-h/7265-h.htm#link2HCH0019 (accessed online 21 July 2014).

of their introductory chapter, their failure to consider the fourth dimension which preceded the more recent concept of the *fifth estate* is conspicuous through absence.[251] All media has some political connotations due to the nature of their work - they report news, but more importantly they question the status quo. Thus the functions which the concept of *public diplomacy* seems to assign to the media, such as reaching out to the local population, are often already fulfilled, to some extent, by the media organizations due to their inherent responsibilities of reporting, investigating, reflecting, and, ultimately, producing impartial and informative content. As such, the BBCPS should be considered first and foremost as a member of the *Fourth Estate,* functioning in line with its own charter, before and above the policy of the British FCO. The BBC was not to be blamed for the Iranian Revolution of 1979, nor was it a 'mouthpiece' of the British Government. It functioned in the same way as any other media institution, and as the press had for the preceding century, but the Shah came in to conflict with the BBCPS due to its independence which he may have considered a threat to his power.

In the mid-nineteenth century, William Thackeray wrote of the press; 'There she is - the great engine - she never sleeps. She has her ambassadors in every quarter of the world - her couriers upon every road. Her officers march along with armies, and her envoys walk into statesmen's cabinets. They are ubiquitous.'[252] Over a century later, this was still true. Perhaps it was the Shah's failure to appreciate the history of the press, and to acknowledge the power it wielded throughout the world, that fostered his paranoia with the BBC. Yet in suppressing the voices of the Iranian press, the Shah created an even greater problem for himself by generating space which would be filled by some form of media; in this case, a void which was to an extent occupied by the BBCPS.

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[251] Sreberny and Torfeh, *Persian Service*, p. 30; William H. Dutton, 'Through the Network (of Networks) - the Fifth Estate' (2007), http://people.oii.ox.ac.uk/dutton/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/5th-estate-lecture-text.pdf (accessed online 21 July 2014).

[252] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, Chapter 30.

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