

## **National Archives**

### **Iran, 1964-1979**

#### **FO 1110/1770**

##### **Ann Elwell, handwritten note, 12 May 1964**

"I know... that General Pakravan (the head of SAVAK) is anxious for Dr Zehtab to learn more about our unattributable publicity activities". *Therefore suggests to suggest to Elliott in Tehran to invite him to UK. Could arrange for him to see the BBC, St Anthony's, the Central Asian Research Centre and the COI and to spend time in IRD.* "I know that there is a feeling that these types of visits are more trouble than they are worth. It is however important to us to keep the Iranian Security Service happy and I think we should at least be able to consolidate our good relations with them by inviting Dr Zehtab".

##### **Michael Elliott, embassy Tehran to Ann Elwell, IRD, 30 May 1964**

"They [SAVAK] have asked us if we can supply the names of some firms in London which would undertake the task of publicising the Iranian image abroad, with a little tourist promotion work as a sideline". *He suggests this be taken forward. Iran could pay up to £50,000 a month.*

##### **Denis Wright, Ambassador, Tehran to Leslie Glass, Foreign Office, 4 June 1964**

"The [IRD] material for unattributable use by the press and radio is at the moment channelled through SAVAK (The Iranian Security Service). Some of it reaches SAVAK direct from the CSO in Ankara; other material... is passed on by us".

##### **Ann Elwell to Michael Elliott, 24 June 1964**

*Reply to above. Has been discussed with Colman Prentis and Varley, one of the biggest UK advertising agencies. Iran not mentioned, just a country. As part of the package they could offer sponsored visits by travel writers, a campaign among travel agents, special invitations to TV and radio reporting groups etc.*

**Leslie Glass to Denis Wright, 2 July 1964**

“In general we feel that the cooperation you maintain with SAVAK both directly and through the CSO is satisfactory and effective. We quite understand that the situation in the last two years has resulted in less demand for blatantly anti-Soviet material in Iran... I hope... you will not fail to let us know when you think there is anything we can usefully provide. We are particularly keen to get ideas for the sort of themes and arguments which would be effective locally’.

**Michael Elliott to Ann Elwell, 10 July 1964**

*Reply to above.* “SAVAK were delighted with the facts you provided and would like to discuss details with Colman Prentis and Varley”.

**Michael Elliott to Ann Elwell, 6 November 1964**

*Zehtab visited in October.* “There is no doubt that the visit was a success and that Zehtab obtained real benefit... from it. He speaks with great enthusiasm of the work being done by IRD”.

**Leslie Glass, Foreign Office, minute, 7 December 1964**

*Notes he had lunch today with General Pakravan, dep premier of Iran and head of SAVAK,* “with which service IRD has cooperated for some years both in CENTO and bilaterally. IRD collaboration seems to be working all right...”

**Ann Elwell, IRD, Foreign Office, minute, 7 December 1964**

“For some years IRD has collaborated with SAVAK... both in the CENTO context and bilaterally... SAVAK has a long history of successful work against the Tudeh (Iranian Communist) Party, using sophisticated counter-espionage and counter-propaganda techniques... The Counter-Subversion Committee [of CENTO] directs the activities of a permanent body in Ankara, the Counter-Subversion Office, of which the Deputy Secretary-general is the Iranian representative, Colonel Negahbani, a member of SAVAK. The UK representative is an IRD officer, Mr Harry Spence, with an IRD assistant, Miss Ruth Bateman. The office receives most of IRD’s output, and spends its funds on book translation, articles for the press and counter-subversive propaganda work of various kinds. Two Turkish, one Iranian and one Pakistani member of the Office paid a study visit to the UK, organised by IRD, earlier this year. We also deal with General Pakravan's service bilaterally, and in doing so Eastern Department have no objection to our discussing the UAR subversive threat. In our embassy in Tehran the Assistant Information Officer is responsible for doing IRD work in consultation with one of General Pakravan's deputies, Dr Zehtab, who spent ten days in the UK at IRD's expense in October this year and was shown a great deal of IRD's activities... It may appear that we devote rather more IRD attention to Iran and CENTO than is justified by the known results. But Iran is an important country

to us, strategically and economically, and CENTO is the only Western alliance of which she is a member. Eastern Department certainly look with benevolent approval on the Department's good relations with General Pakravan, who is close to the Shah. They hope that what we are able to do for the Iranians in the way of helping them with their own public relations work and discussing their counter-subversive problems with them may go some way towards offsetting occasional Anglo-American churlishness in other CENTO fields of activity”.

*March 1965 – Shah visits UK, Queen and Prime Minister Wilson*

*March 1970 – Cabinet approves the sale of 250 chieftain tanks to Iran*

## **FCO 17/1724**

### **FCO brief, 'Secretary of State's talks in Tehran', 19 March 1972**

*A brief for Alec Douglas-Home. “Iran is an ally and we regard her as a stabilising factor in the region... Power rests with the Shah. Half the members of the Senate are nominated by him; the remaining 30 members, who are elected, and the 268 members of the Majles (Lower House), also elected, are carefully vetted by him. Ministers hold office at his pleasure and he exercises a close and authoritative control over day-to-day affairs... There is little prospect of the Shah's regime being overthrown”.*

## **FCO 8 / 1882**

### **Peter Ramsbotham, ambassador, Tehran, 'Unrest in Iran', 17 June 1972**

*The last year and a half has seen the beginning of guerilla-type opposition to the regime, including bombings by the Freedom Movement with ties to Iraq, but also student unrest. Notes causes of student unrest and intellectual discontent such as a chaotic higher education system, shortage of teachers and “above all, political frustration with the Shah's autocratic rule”. Also notes religious fundamentalists who want a return to pure Islam, encouraged by Ayatollah Khomeini.*

“The unrest raises questions about Iran's long-term position as a bastion of stability in the Middle East. In the short term we need not be unduly worried. The establishment is behind the regime”. *In next 5-6 years there is unlikely to be any upset to Iran's stability. But in the long term, “it may be that we shall have to consider whether we can or should warn the Shah of the possible consequences of the continuation of the present system of government, without greater flexibility, delegation of authority and political freedom”.*

**B.Smith, Middle East Department, FCO, minute, 16 June 1972**

*Notes Ramsbotham's estimate of stability for next six years or so. "But the first step on the road from dictatorship to genuine democracy is an enormous one which so far the Shah does not seem able to envisage... We should bear in mind that by 1978 we shall just about complete delivery of the 800 Chieftains, plus whatever other sophisticated equipment the Shah may order (including perhaps a gun and ammunition factory). All this equipment could be in the hands of a revolutionary government".*

**Peter Ramsbotham, 'The survival of the Persian monarchy', 8 June 1972**

*The Shah has achieved a lot in economic development but there is rising discontent especially due to "the inefficiencies of administration and the inequalities of national wealth." "The Shah is becoming increasingly autocratic... and every year the Shah is taking more power into his own hands... Instead of leaders of character, he is breeding a coterie of toadies and frightened functionaries". This is not to say that Iran will soon see a revolutionary situation though these dangers may be greater in six or so years' time than now.*

**FCO 46 / 806**

**Chiefs of Staff committee, 'Defence cooperation with Iran', 12 October 1972**

Nearly 800 Iranian officers attended courses in the UK in 1972. Eight UK officers and 80 NCOs are currently in Iran in a training advisory capacity.

**Chiefs of Staff committee, 'Military assistance to Iran', 21 August 1972**

"The UK regards Iran as an important ally both economically and because she is a major oil producer who is prepared to guarantee supplies to the West at stable prices, and strategically for her pro-Western stance most practically demonstrated by the continued existence of the military air route across Iran to the Far East.... It is clearly in the UK's interests to support the Shah".

**FCO 8 / 1885**

**Alec Douglas-Home, Foreign Secretary to embassy, Tehran, 11 December 1972**

*On the book by Sharpe. "Head of Middle East today expressed regret to the Iranian embassy about this publication and gave an assurance that the views in the book in*

no way reflected official policy". *Sharpe is a grade 10 officer working at Wilton Park.* "We have merely told the Iranians that she 'appears to be a very junior official' and that she is totally unconnected with Iranian affairs within the office".

### **FCO brief, 'Anglo-Iranian relations', 12 December 1972**

"The seal on the very close and cordial relations was set by the successful visit of the Shah and the Empress in June... Iran is by far the leading customer for British defence equipment and last year took 22% of our total overseas defence sales. Recent purchases include frigates, hovercraft, Rapier missiles and Chieftain tanks ... military exports to Iran are currently running at about £60 million per annum".

"The Iranian embassy have drawn our attention to a recently published book entitled 'A visit to Iran' written by a junior FCO officer, Mrs Elisabeth Sharpe. The book contains frequent allegations of corruption, persecution and torture in Iran and includes disobliging references to the Shah. The Head of the Middle East Department has formally expressed regret to the Iranian Minister/Counsellor and has assured him that the views in the book in no way reflect HMG's views of Iran. He has recommended that a personal letter of regret should go from the PUS to the Iranian Ambassador since the book, and our reactions to it, will without doubt be conveyed to the Shah." *In the 'line to take' for Lord Balniel, FCO minister in his upcoming talk with Mr Afshar, Iranian ambassador in London:* "The Minister of State may wish to state that he is aware of the matter and hopes that this unfortunate publication will not be allowed to mar the excellent relations which exist between our two countries".

### **FCO 8/2049**

#### **Peter Ramsbotham, ambassador Tehran, 'Annual Review for 1972', 22 December 1972**

"Discontent within Iran, due to political, social and administrative frustrations, posed other problems. By the middle of the year, there were signs of growing discontent throughout the country... The underlying discontent will remain so long as the government continues to sit on the safety valves of political and social expression..."

"So long as he [*Shah*] arrogates [*sic*] all power to himself... he cannot easily tolerate the wide-ranging criticism which is the normal prerogative of a healthy opposition party. Moreover, his personal and detailed control over every facet of the Administration and economy is proving to be inhibiting, not only to political party activity but also to the sense of responsibility of his ministers, senior civil servants and other leaders in the country. Meanwhile, the subservience of the administration,

the armed forces and indeed the press to the Shah's dominating position, increased throughout the year”.

“There has been close cooperation and exchange of information with the Iranians” *throughout the year. Foreign Secretary had talks with the Shah in March and June and the Shah visited the UK in June. “They [the Shah and the empress] came as guests of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor the Royal Ascot races”.*

## FCO 8 / 2050

**Peter Ramsbotham, ambassador, Tehran to Patrick Wright, Middle East Department, FCO, 1 March 1973**

“In your letter of 18 January... you were apprehensive that the Shah may be moving towards megalomania if not dictatorship... Despite the external trappings of a constitutionalism, he is effectively a dictator already – but I think it is an exaggeration to taint him with megalomania...His desire to hold on to power is not so much 'manic' as deriving from a genuine conviction that no one else is so well qualified to guide Iran's destiny”.

*Notes* “the undercurrent of radical, clerical opposition which we have been confident exists and is taken seriously by SAVAK”. *Recently a young mullah was prevented from preaching at a prayer hall renowned for the gathering of dissidents. A crowd gathered to protest and was arrested. Also, an old and respected mullah has been telling small study groups that the white revolution celebrations were an offence against Islam in their glorification of the Shah. “It may be difficult to understand, from London, why such minor incidents have any bearing on the political situation here. The answer is, I think that Islam is, at least in theory, an essentially democratic religion preaching equality of wealth and opportunity. Iran is conspicuous for neither at present and a mullah with strong convictions, who is prepared to stick his neck out, can exploit far better than any Marxist the lower classes' feeling of frustration at the luxurious, irreligious way of life of the ruling elite and of their own lack of freedom of expression... The government is, naturally, aware of these dangers. Apart from the expediency of close political control of clerics it is hoping that, in the long run, the effects of greater prosperity in the country will shake the mullah's hold and discredit their form of 'democratic' concepts. But the mullahs' influence is likely to remain substantial for a long time”.*

## **PREM 15/1684**

### **FCO brief to Prime Minister, 'Visit of the Shah of Iran', July 1973**

*“Anglo-Iranian relations remain very close and there are no specific problems”. In 1971, two contracts were signed for the supply of 747 Chieftain tanks plus spares and support, worth approximately £130m; in July 1971 a contract was signed for the supply of Rapier weapons valued at £43m; a contract was signed in the late 1960s for supply of four Mk V Destroyers, worth £18m; a contract was signed to deliver two support ships, worth £10m; a contract was signed in July 1973 for the supply of 250 Scorpion vehicles, worth £16m. Also lists other sales under negotiation and others' under discussion, including Blowpipe, tactical trainer aircraft and cruisers. Discussions are also taking place between Iran and UK companies on the building of a “military-industrial complex near Isfahan” worth around £100m – this would manufacture spare parts and ammunition for Chieftains under licence from UK.*

*The Shah visited the UK in May 1959, March 1965 and June 1972.*

## **FCO 8 / 2507**

### **Defence Attache's [Col J.Cowgill] report for 1973, 4 March 1974**

*“The various [British] military teams in Iran have continued to fulfil a very useful purpose, and several of them have had to be expanded. Plans are now afoot for an increased military presence.” The UK has a 27 strong team to advise the Iranian army on all technical matters concerning Chieftain tanks and spare parts. Notes the “large amount of RAF flying which takes place in Iran”. In the second half of 1973 there were 15 detachments of RAF aircraft sent to Iran varying from one aircraft to 7 and involving 454 personnel.*

### **Anthony Parsons, ambassador, Tehran, to James Callaghan, Foreign Secretary, 27 March 1974**

*Notes that that the UK is becoming “more deeply involved in equipping the Iranian ground and naval forces and in the training of technical and other elements. This growing commitment of manpower, both military and civilian, will bring with it benefits and risks. Without it, our arms sales would quickly decline...The benefits to the United Kingdom of our arms sales to Iran are enormous and we must continue to reap them.”*

## FCO 8/2262

*Contains a Newsweek report, 'Quiet... SAVAK may be listening', of 14 October 1974. This notes that 30,000-60,000 people work for SAVAK. Opposition groups say there are 50,000 political prisoners in Iran and there have been 200 executions in the last four years. Amnesty International and others have documented numerous cases of torture. Quotes a 'British specialist in Iranian affairs' saying: 'They [Savak] are extremely efficient and certainly as brutal as any secret police in the area'. A note from D.Makinson, Brit embassy, Tehran to FCO News Department, 15 October 1974 says that the quote comes from Nick Browne, of the embassy in Tehran.*

### **Anthony Parsons to James Callaghan, 'What happens if the Shah dies?', 4 July 1974**

“The country is governed by one man who takes all the major decisions and many minor ones... Very few Iranians feel that they play any real part in decision taking... Relatively minor complaints can be aired but fundamental criticism of the Shah or government must never be put forward in public... The suppression of a great number of what we would regard as normal liberties is not unusual in Iran and many people take it for granted – nevertheless there is also a liberal tradition dating back to the turn of the century, the time of the Constitution, and this older tradition combines with the aspirations of the young, particularly those who have been educated in the West, to cause frustration and discontent... The instruments of government, almost universally at the lower levels, and not uncommonly at the higher levels, can be cruelly oppressive and at best unhelpful and incompetent. Corruption is very prevalent. Religion is important to the majority of the people, if not to the educated minority, and, in spite of Savak's penetration and control, there are still many clerics who resent the encroachment of the secular state over religious affairs since Reza Shah's reforms: these people are always ready to take advantage of, and to exacerbate popular emotions. Religious feeling is linked with nationalism and xenophobia, still both present in Iranian society. There are thus many with grudges against the regime who would take their revenge if they had the chance”.

### **Patrick Wright, Middle East Department, FCO to Anthony Parsons, Tehran, 18 July 1974**

“Iran is as a good a bet for British interests as most countries and I agree that the longer the Shah lasts the better the chances of a peaceful succession and even, with a little bit of luck, that there is still a good chance of a strong and basically pro-Western government in the event of his premature disappearance”.

## FCO 8 / 2507

### **P.Williams, Middle East Department, FCO, minute, 31 January 1975**

“Despite the Iranian role over the increase in oil prices our relations with Iran are extremely close and friendly and to our mutual benefit. Commercially, Iran represents an export market of almost £280 million and provides about 19 per cent of our oil supply. Iran is also our major overseas customer for defence equipment. Politically, we are in close contact with the Iranians on a wide variety of subjects and see Iran, and our influence there, as providing a valuable contribution to the stability of the area. At the same time we have to recognise the extreme sensitivity of the Shah... to any suggestion whatsoever of adverse comment on Iran. The Iranians will not fail to take note and report to Tehran anything said by our delegation [*to the Human Rights commission*] which could even remotely be construed as critical of the Iranian government. From past experience any such report could well result in serious damage to our bilateral relations”.

### **FCO brief for meeting between the Foreign Secretary [James Callaghan] and the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, September 1975**

“The Secretary of State might refer to our close and friendly relations... We have welcomed the useful contribution the Shah's forces have made towards the success of the campaign in Dhofar and look forward to the arrival of the additional battalion he will be sending to Oman” .... “The excellent state of relations between Iran and the UK...’

“We consider that Iran is an important factor for stability in this area which produces over 70 per cent of our oil imports and the Shah sees us a counterweight to Russian influence in the region... Iran is a major overseas customer for British defence equipment”. *The major items are chieftains, frigates and support ships.*

## FCO 8/2512

### **Foreign Office background note, ‘Anglo-Iranian relations in the defence sphere’, 13 June 1975**

“Despite the unhelpful role which the Iranian have played in pressing for high oil prices, their growing political importance in the area makes it expedient for us to exploit their increasing purchasing power and to maintain and develop the close and friendly relations we have enjoyed with the Shah since the resolution of the islands question in the Persian Gulf at the end of 1971”.

“Iran is of great importance to us as a market for defence equipment. Firm sales at present total about £800m and further potential sales amount to about £500m”. *The main component of this is Chieftains, the original order for which was 764 and a second order for 1,500, the two contracts worth £600m. 470 tanks have been delivered so far.* “Construction has begun on a military industries complex, which is expected to earn British companies about £80m worth of business”.

**Foreign Office brief, 'Political and economic background and personality notes', June 1975**

“The Iranian security forces claim to be well in control and there is no reason to doubt this. There continue, however, to be occasional outbreaks of violence and demonstrations, notably in the universities. These, and the secret trials and executions of terrorists, are from time to time the subject of demonstrations and critical comment abroad, including comment in the British media to which the Shah takes particular exception”.

**CAB 128/64**

**Conclusions of Cabinet meeting, 14 September 1978**

*Owen:* “There seemed little doubt that human rights in Iran were more likely to be improved if the Shah was able to pursue his present policies than if he was replaced by the Islamic opposition.”

*Prime Minister:* “We should increasingly have to take into account the rise of Islam as a political force in a large part of the world. It was not yet clear whether its impact would be for good or ill. The Cabinet agreed that we should continue to support the Shah”.

**Cabinet conclusions of meeting, 9 November 1979**

*Owen:* “Whatever his faults, it was still in our interests that the Shah should remain in power. A military government without him would be no improvement and a government under the anti-British Ayatollah Khomeini would be far worse”.

**PREM16/1719**

**Anthony Parsons to FCO, 11 October 1978**

Parsons had a long audience with the Shah on 10 October. “I made clear that, so far as the British were concerned, he need not have any worry that we were messing around with the opposition or that we were thinking of ratting”.

**Bryan Cartledge to W.Prendergast, FCO, 30 October 1978**

*Notes that the Prime Minister read Anthony Parsons' recent despatch from Tehran on the recent disturbances and the PM commented: "On the basis of this, I would not give much for the Shah's chances. I think Dr Owen should start thinking about reinsuring!"*

**W.Prendergast, FCO to Bryan Cartledge, 1 November 1978**

*Includes a brief for the Prime Minister entitled 'Iran: visit and report by the international commission of enquiry'. The UK view is that "the Shah's government still represents the best hope for unity in the country and an orderly transition to a more liberal and democratic structure... Iran's strategic position is of vital importance to our interests... Our assessment is that our objectives in this region are less likely to be served by an alternative regime".*

**W.Prendergast, FCO, to Bryan Cartledge, Private Secretary to Prime Minister, 2 November 1978**

*Includes a paper entitled 'Iran: commercial contingency planning'. Notes that Iran is the biggest UK market in Asia and that UK will deliver 1,225 'Shir Iran II' tanks worth £1,100m between 1980-6. "The indirect employment of British workers offered by the Iranian market must run into many thousands". Notes three possibilities if the Shah goes: a military regime, an Islamic republic, and a communist dominated regime. An Islamic republic would likely "eradicate Western influences and non-essential western interests. Our trade balance would deteriorate as Iran would probably continue to sell her oil to the west in order to earn hard currency. A government of this complexion would call in [sic] question the role of the oil majors in the Consortium, accuse them of enjoying a monopoly position and seek to destroy their influence over the oil industry. This could have an important bearing upon the level of British exports where these are connected with the servicing of the oil and gas industries".*

**CAB 130/1060**

**Draft report by the Cabinet Group on Iran, 'Iran - the political future', November 1978**

*The report considers policies of a future government dominated by Islamic fundamentalists. They would presumably resist Western influence. "However, there is no reason to suppose from other countries where Islam plays a prominent part in government, for example Saudi Arabia, that Western interests would necessarily be at risk. Nor do we see any likelihood that a government dominated by the religious*

hierarchy would favour particularly closer ties with the Soviet Union and a change in broad regional objectives”.

**Cabinet paper, ‘The political future for Iran’, November 1978**

*In an Islamic republic*, “while some of its social policies might be reactionary, in economic and foreign affairs it will likely pursue a radical and nationalist policy. Such a government would seek to dispense with foreign advice and that of the business community... In foreign policy, an Islamic republic would probably be neutralist and withdraw Iran from Cento”, *and would sympathise with Shias*.

**PREM16/1720**

**Note of meeting between Prime Minister and US Senators, Downing St, 10 November 1978**

“The prime minister went on to say that the new growth of a distinctive Moslem approach to affairs was an important development: in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey and now Iran, there were religious pressures for a retreat from the twentieth century capitalism [*sic*] and industrialisation. This development would not necessarily be favourable to the Soviet Union but the West should watch it carefully”.

**Anthony Parsons to FCO, 4 December 1978**

*Parsons had an audience with the Shah in which* “I briefed the Shah on our own contacts with opposition politicians”.

**Prime Minister’s discussion with Premier Trudeau at 10 Downing Street on 7 December 1978**

“The prime minister commented that the opposition movement in Iran was linked, at least in spirit with the wider Islamic movement which was gaining momentum in other areas of the Middle East and Asia and which the Soviet Union, with a large Moslem population of its own, had good reason to regard with some apprehension”.

**Prime Minister, personal message to President Carter, undated [December 1978]**

*Notes that the removal of the Shah would have* “the gravest political, strategic and economic implications for the West” *but also*: “It is of only minor consolation that continued chaos in the country or the emergence of an extreme government

dominated by the religious right wing might create almost as many problems for the Soviet Union”.

## **PREM 16/2130**

### **W.Prendergast, FCO to Bryan Cartledge, Downing Street, 29 November 1978**

*The Shah asked for internal security equipment from the UK after protests in August and September. In November, Foreign Secretary David Owen approved the sale of 175,000 CS gas cartridges and up to 360 unarmed armoured personnel carriers but refused the request for 500 electric shock sticks and armoured cars over concerns that the Iranians would go beyond using ‘minimum force’.*

### **Fred Mulley, Defence Secretary to Prime Minister, 21 February 1979**

“We therefore need to decide how to wind up the outstanding business [*i.e., military contracts*] so as to do least damage to our own interests and to our relations with the new regime in Iran”.

### **Sir John Hunt, Cabinet Secretary, to Prime Minister, 20 March 1979**

*On February 6<sup>th</sup> the Bakhtiar government sent a letter to the UK government repudiating six military contracts including for over 1,500 tanks worth £1,250m, cluster bombs and to build support ships. “In winding up the contracts, we should not give the impression that we are turning our backs on Iran: without being over-pressing [*sic*], we should let the Iranians know that we are ready, if they wish, to resume the supply of routine items such as ammunition and spare parts which are essential to the basic functions of their armed forces... We should also continue to encourage them to complete any contracts which they have not yet repudiated or defaulted on... In settling the defence contracts we had with the former regime we should lose no opportunity to foster our relationship with the new government”.*