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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN
DURING JIMMY CARTER PRESIDENCY**

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**ДВОСТОРОННІ ВІДНОСИНИ США З ІРАНОМ ЗА ПРЕЗИДЕНСТВА
ДЖИММІ КАРТЕРА**

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Abstract: The modern international relations are characterized by aggravation of contradictions between key countries, regional and international economic, political and religious centers. Relations between the US and Iran have a long history, which was accompanied by a rather ambiguous periods from partnership and comprehensive support, to conflict and readiness to act decisively. The article describes the US policy on Iran in the 1970s, which was realized by the Carter administration. Islamic revolution, the capture of hostages in Tehran led to the termination of the relationship between the US and Iran. The war between the North and South Yemen and penetration of Soviet troops in Afghanistan led to the approval of the Carter Doctrine. New foreign policy in the Middle East declared the Persian Gulf as a region of its vital interests and intended to protect it using military power.

Key words: US foreign policy, Iran, Hostage Crisis, Carter Doctrine, Islamic Revolution 1979, the Near and Middle East, the Persian Gulf countries.

Резюме. Сучасні міжнародні відносини характеризуються загостренням протиріч між ключовими країнами, регіональними та міжнародними економічними, політичними і релігійними центрами. Відносини між США і Іраном мають давню історію, яка супроводжувалася досить неоднозначними періодами від партнерства і всебічної підтримки до конфлікту і готовності до рішучих дій. У статті розглядається політичний курс США щодо Ірану в 1970-ті роки, який був реалізований адміністрацією Дж. Картера. Ісламська революція 1979 р. та захоплення заручників в Тегерані призвели до припинення відносин між Сполученими Штатами та Іраном. Війна між Північним і Південним Єменом та інтервенція радянських військ в Афганістан привели до затвердження доктрина Картера. Нова зовнішня політика США на Близькому Сході проголосила Перську затоку регіоном своїх життєвих інтересів і передбачила їх за допомогою військової сили.

Ключові слова: зовнішня політика США, Іран, криза із заручниками, доктрина Картера, Ісламська революція 1979, Близький і Середній Схід, країни Перської затоки.

Introduction. When Jimmy Carter became president in January 1977, he inherited good relations with Iran and authoritarian ruler M. Reza Pahlavi. The close



US- Iranian relations have established after World War II when, the government of Prime Minister M. Mosaddeq was overthrown by a joint US-British secret operations in 1953 and Shah was returned to power.

The unique and unprecedented relationship with the Iranian ruler was created in the late 1960s by President R. Nixon and Secretary of State H. Kissinger. According to “twin pillars” concept Iran has been identified as the main protector of US interests in the Gulf. In turn, the Shah was allowed to buy any nonnuclear military equipment from the United States. Although the Ford administration was concerned about the sale of such a large number of weapons and suppression of opposition by Shah in Iran, US policy according Iran has not changed since Iran was a major supplier of oil and Shah willingly played the role of a regional leader and supporter of US policy to contain the Soviet Union in Middle East and argued against potential threats from Islamic fundamentalists, nationalists and procommunist forces.

The main text. Coming to office of a candidate from the Democratic Party predicted a new era in American foreign policy under the motto of a new president to adhere the moral values. As Reynolds considers: “few presidents have expressed such passion for human rights, as has Jimmy Carter” [13, 104]. In his inaugural address in 1977 and in a speech at the University of Notre Dame in the same year, he shared his vision of a new era in American foreign policy, which was based on democratic idealism of W. Wilson, who defended freedom, peace and human rights. [2, 384].

Becoming a president Carter continued to maintain relations with the Shah established by Nixon administration, but its policy was based on different principles. As noted Secretary of State C. Vance “there would be marked differences in the way in which we conducted our bilateral relations, particularly as regards arms sales and human rights” [21, 314].

As part of his program on human rights, Carter criticized and questioned the expediency of selling large quantities of arms to Iran, a country where the use of torture and political persecution became commonplace in the 1970s. The secret police SAVAK, which was feared and hated by all Iranian population, received broad freedom to identify and intimidate political opponents of the Shah and the destruction of urban guerrilla organizations that made opposition to the regime of M. Reza Pahlavi [14, 23]. Although the president in all public speeches avoided comments on the authoritarian leadership of Reza Pahlavi, he did not appoint the ambassador to Tehran for next six months, according to historian Spencer, trying to show the Shah that the new administration will keep him at a distance until he ceases to pursue his people [18, 74]. Carter also canceled the sale of 250 aircrafts F-16. The main goal of the administration was to force Shah reduce human rights violations in Iran in exchange for arms supplies.

Carter’s appeal to moral duty of US to encourage human rights, freedom and equality in the world, disturbed the Shah during the election campaign. Considering this political topics it isn’t surprising that Iran, which was an ally of the United States from the beginning of the Cold War, was concerned about the foreign policy of the new administration. Shah, according to professor from University of North Carolina Charles Kurzman, was really convinced that, as the Iranian people were unfamiliar and not aware of such Western concepts as a parliamentary democracy and political



parties, they were not prepared for wide rights and needed a large and skilled guardianship for their prosperous future [10, 12]. More menacing was the fact that this unique role that the US decided to play to protect and preserve human rights in Iran, could jeopardize the beneficial alliance between Shah and Washington, which he built with previous US governments.

While Carter tried to run a hard line in dealing with Tehran, some of his advisers, including National Security Adviser Z. Brzezinski, expressed concern that such a policy would permanently endanger relations between the two countries [13, 108]. In the end, the administration decided more cautiously approach to solving the problems of human rights during the visit of Secretary of State C. Vance to Tehran in May 1977. During the discussion according arms sales Shah expressed his desire to purchase 10 aircrafts equipped with sophisticated radar systems, electronic surveillance and modern communication devices (AWACS), the sale of which had to pass the approval of Congress.

However, Congress rejected the sale of fighters on the grounds that the security of modern electronic devices cannot be guaranteed in Iran [18, 183]. Shah was furious because of delay of delivery and even threatened to cancel and terminate the agreement. Carter was in predicament, and in his memoirs states that tried to reduce the sale and distribution of weapons around the world, but to implement it by too abrupt changes in current practice was impossible, because of contracts that were signed by past administrations [4, 434].

Although Carter saw double standards in his decision to continue selling arms, he understood that the United States couldn't afford to stop the supply of Iranian oil or refuse to use observation stations along the Iranian border, which are extremely important to monitor Soviet missile activity. Carter admitted that distance with Iran can be disastrous, and therefore had to move away from his moral principles.

In addition to the sale of AWACS, as noted by Gary Sick, Carter also approved an additional sale of arms to Iran for 1,1 billion dol., including military training and supply of spare parts and equipment [14, 31]. Carter and Shah also reached a verbal consent on an agreement on non-proliferation and discussed the Arab-Israeli problem and a new attempt to find a peaceful settlement. Such results of the visit as a continuation of arms sale contracts and additional incentives tarnished the image of Carter as president who sought to reduction of the spread of weapons. These agreements with the Shah exposed, as Reynolds believes, his inner conflict between idealism, his moral principles and realism of international relations [13, 109].

The resume of bilateral relations was not passed unnoticed among American society, where strong criticism of authoritarian regime of the Shah and his domestic policy started, particularly regarding the numerous human rights violations and its role in maintaining high oil prices, and in Iran, where the demonstrations began and unrest between human rights defenders and the Tehran government. Demonstrations confirmed the readiness of the Iranian society to exercise the active opposition to despotic leader, whose main purpose was to turn Iran into a regional superpower.

A week after the visit of US President to Teheran riots broke out in Iran. By mid-1978, street demonstrations escalated into a full-scale revolution led by ayatollah Khomeini, a well-known political and religious leader who because of radical



demonstrations against the Shah was arrested and expelled from the country in 1963.

Considering the different approaches to cooperation with the Iranian government Carter was faced with conflicting advice given by his advisors. US political establishment was shared by supporters of moderate approach, led by Secretary of State C. Vance and the US ambassador in Iran William Sullivan and apologists of hard approach of Shah to solve the crisis in Iran, which was supported by Z. Brzezinski, National Security Adviser. Brzezinski and Vance had a vast experience in foreign policy, which Carter lacked, but they supported entirely different positions on a number of key issues. While the Secretary of State was a careful and persuasive diplomat, National Security Adviser was a supporter of a hard line.

Controversial advice from Washington and overdue reforms, in result of which the Shah promised to hold parliamentary elections in 1979 and form a centrist coalition government has failed to stop the protesters. February 1st 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini arrived to Tehran, and after 2 weeks, monarchy fell and was formed Islamic revolutionary government. For the first time the United States had to establish contact with a radical political Islam. US tried to establish pragmatic relations with the new government. Some progress has been made in the summer of 1979 with the secular, technocratic provisional government led by Prime Minister M. Bazargan and Foreign Minister I. Yazdi [17, 129].

In terms of conflict resolution, the events in Iran showed numerous errors in US intelligence, including problems with the collection of information on events in Iran, and significant interagency competition that affected the failure of the State Department and intelligence agencies to provide complete and accurate information to the White House [22, 28]. The representatives of the State Department, who knew about the extent of the crisis and declared its consequences, were not included in decision-making process and organizational capacity and political power of supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini were underestimated. In addition, many officials were convinced that the Soviet Union took part in inciting rebellion against the Shah, but there was little evidence [14, 105].

Events in Iran just entered a new stage of development. In October 1979, President Carter reluctantly allowed the Shah, who was terminally ill to come to the United States for medical care. This provoked a strong reaction in Tehran. A crowd of students attacked the US embassy in November 4, taking 52 hostages captive, demanding return of M. Reza Pahlavi and its financial assets to Iran. Khomeini supported the actions of students and government of Bazargan resigned. November 5, 1979 Iran broke the agreement on cooperation in 1959 with the United States. These events marked the beginning of a period in history of Iranian-American relations called – Hostage Crisis, which lasted 444 days until 1981, when the US embassy workers were released.

Carter immediately begins to act to resolve the issue and sends November 6 former Attorney General R. Clark, and head of the Senate Intelligence Committee B. Miller in Iran for talks on the release of hostages, but Ayatollah Khomeini refuses to meet them. Then the US unilaterally terminate the supply of military spare parts to Iran. In addition, Carter ordered the Immigration Service to check 50,000 Iranian



students who were in the US to the deportation of those who violated the conditions of staying in accordance with issued visas. Moreover, December 7, 1979 Court of Appeal allowed the US to deport offenders home. Due to the refusal of Iran to negotiate, the president decides to impose an embargo on Iranian oil imports and 12 November 1979 in accordance with section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the United States refused to purchase oil from Iran [6, 38]. Tehran responded to the following actions with oil export embargo against the United States. The next day the US House of Representatives voted unanimously 379 to ban foreign aid and military assistance to Iran [20].

The sharp deterioration in Iran-US relations caused the declaration of national emergency against Iran by the United States. In the Executive Order № 12170 November 14, 1979 is stated that based on the Constitution and laws of the United States President considers the situation in Iran as unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and the US economy and declares a state of emergency in response to this threat. Invoking International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which allowed the president to regulate commerce after declaring a national emergency in response to any extraordinary threat to the US, which has a foreign source president called for the arrest of the entire property of the Islamic Republic of Iran and income from it. Hence, President Jimmy Carter introduced a number of sanctions included a ban on imports of Iranian oil and blocking Iranian government assets in the United States banks and foreign subsidiaries, which together accounted for \$ 12 billion. Tehran instead announced the closure of the Iranian airspace and territorial waters to US aircraft and shipping [20].

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 accelerated intentions of Carter administration to change the conceptual content of foreign policy in the Middle East and made its introduction inevitable. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was seen as the first step to increasing the influence of the USSR in the region, while the US dominance in the Gulf was undermined by the Islamic Revolution and the fall of the Shah.

The new policy was formulated by President Jimmy Carter in his State of the Union Address on January 23, 1980 and became known as the Carter Doctrine. The new foreign policy agenda argued the thesis about aggressiveness of the Soviet Union that increased in recent years.

The intervention of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was seen as approach towards the oil fields of the Persian Gulf and as an attempt to establish control over the region. At the end of his speech, Carter said the key thesis of new foreign policy approach: "Let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force". This phrase was written by National Security Adviser Z. Brzezinski, who modeled the formulation of Carter Doctrine, as he recalls in his memoirs, based on Truman Doctrine and insisted that the proposal was included in the speech "to make it very clear that the Soviets should stay away from the Persian Gulf" [3, 444]. Thus Washington, emphasized the exceptional importance of oil resources of the Persian Gulf for the economy of Western countries,



and claimed that to protect their supply will be used all means.

Carter's rating was falling rapidly and until mid-summer 1980 President's actions in the international arena were approved only by 21% of Americans [9, 280]. For many in the US and international media failed mission was a symbol of the Carter's administration as a whole, providing further evidence of foreign policy incompetence which was associated with the president [1]. The Reagan campaign deliberately pressed on the atmosphere of gloom, despair and national feebleness, which was reinforced by the failed rescue mission. Foreign policy was certainly not the only decisive factor that led to the defeat of Jimmy Carter's presidential election in 1980. Worsening economic conditions, failure to resolve the conflict and weak and out of season decisions in foreign policy has created inevitable negative image of good intentions to achieve peace, justice and equality in the world, and led eventually to the failed presidency.

Death of Shah Reza Pahlavi July 27, 1980 and the war that began September 22, 1980 between Iran and Iraq, prompted the Iranian government to enter into negotiations with the United States, Algeria and Britain as intermediaries. The final negotiations were held in Algiers January 19, 1981, where the Algiers Agreement was signed between the US and Iran. As a result of the transaction all the hostages were released and taken to Wiesbaden, Germany on the day of the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan.

Consequently, Carter followed the outlook of W. Wilson, believing that American idealism can be applied to solve practical issues of foreign policy. As a result, he always tried to find a balance between his idealistic aspirations and realism that opposed him performing his duties as president.

Having little experience in international affairs, Jimmy Carter came to power, putting human rights at the basis of all US foreign policy. He believed that the United States should ensure that their allies and rivals were responsible for human rights violations. To achieve this, he used as leverage, American humanitarian and financial assistance to make countries that have human rights violations accountable for their policies. The same methods he used in dealing with Iran. However, due to inexperience, political blunders, contradictory and radically opposing advice from his advisers and a number of events, his efforts, achievements and ambitions as president eventually were undermined.

Conclusions. Although Carter's policy can be accused of termination of relations between the US and Iran, but it was not the first or last administration that was wrong in its policy according Tehran. Almost every president's policy after World War II was wrong, cooperating with Iran, but Carter's failures were probably the most striking. One can critically evaluate Carter's policy of human rights in Iran, but the great contribution made political decisions that were taken there before his presidency. The obstacles he has faced after coming to power outweighed the main vectors of his foreign policy principles of human rights. Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the islamization of Iran, the war in Yemen, the encroachment of limited contingent of Soviet forces in Afghanistan have led to more aggressive US policy in the Middle East.

The total complexity of the international situation, and especially the situation in



the Gulf region, has necessitated revision of US foreign policy that did not provide, according to Carter administration, the protection of vital interests. In this regard was adopted Carter Doctrine, emphasizing the crucial importance of oil resources from the Persian Gulf for the economy of Western countries, it proclaimed this region the zone of its vital interests that would be protected by a specially designed unit of the armed forces.

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