

THEN AND NOW

America in Iran

By A Correspondent

In 1953, the CIA orchestrated a coup that overthrew the government of the popular Prime Minister Mossadeq. The coup brought to power Mohammed Reza Pahlavi-the Shah of Iran- who served as a close and subservient enforcer of the interests of US empire in the Middle East for nearly 26 years.

In 1976, Amnesty International reported that the Shah's regime had the "highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts and a history of torture which is beyond belief. No country in the world has a worse record in human rights than Iran."

And yet, US President Jimmy Carter proclaimed, "Under the Shah's brilliant leadership Iran is an island of stability in one of the most troublesome regions of the world. There is no other state figure whom I could appreciate and like more." Carter's statements about supporting human rights at the time, and his positions since leaving the White House notwithstanding, this fervent support for the Shah was dictated by his role as commander-in-chief of the US empire, and the strategic role that the Shah's Iran played as a powerful regional enforcer of US interests.

An uprising of millions of people drove the Shah from power, but not before the Shah's military gunned down thousands of protesters. Several thousand people were murdered on September 8, 1978, in massacres that came to be known as "Bloody Friday." The revolution that drove out the Shah, however, was stolen from the people by Islamic fundamentalist clerics.

As the Shah fell, the US used its diplomatic resources to assist the Ayatollah Khomeini in coming to power-seeing him as the better bet than allowing the uprising to continue with the possibility that progressive, or even revolutionary forces could come to the fore. One senior US official wrote in February 1979, Khomeini's movement "is far better organized, enlightened, able to resist communism than its detractors would lead us to believe".

When the Iranian regime attacked post-election protests in June, Obama issued a fairly muted criticism, saying that "The universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected and the United States stands with all who seek to exercise those rights," but even these muted complaints have hypocrisy stamped all over them. The US has never balked at imposing, supporting, and enforcing its interests through brutal dictators, especially in the oppressed nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Those who harbor illusions about the kinds of changes the US is angling to bring to Iran might look to the east, to Afghanistan, or to the west, to Iraq, to see models of the democracy the US brings to the world.

Over the past several years, the danger of US or Israeli military aggression against Iran has hung over the Middle East, and the world, like an ominous cloud. Israel, which has a substantial nuclear weapons arsenal, has repeatedly threatened strikes against Iran using the pretext of Iran's nuclear program-a program that to date has produced no nuclear weapons. And mainstream media sources funnel a steady stream of "leaks," "rumors," and insider quotes speculating on the imminence of an Israeli military air strike on Iran.

During the election campaign, Obama criticized Bush for a one-dimensional approach to Iran, and called for a mix of "unilateral and multilateral sanctions" and "aggressive diplomacy." The bottom line however, underneath whatever diplomatic initiatives Obama takes, is the threat of military aggression (and sanctions, militarily enforced, are a form of military aggression with a particular edge of creating misery and death for the civilian population).

US military threats against Iran escalated sharply in the recent past. On September 18, Obama announced plans to redirect US missiles (referred to by the US as "anti-

missile defenses") towards Iran. Much news coverage focused on accusations from Republicans that this represented Obama backing down from confronting Russia, but the lead sentence in the AP story on the decision summed up the essential point: "The Obama administration's revamped plan for a European missile shield is part of a broad new strategy for squeezing Iran." That article continued, "With US troops already stationed on Iran's eastern and western flanks—in Iraq and Afghanistan—the addition of anti-missile weapons aboard US Navy ships in the region would add to Iran's military isolation." And news reports have also speculated that part of the package of moving missiles that Moscow objected to was more active Russian support for moves against Iran.

Any US or Israeli attack on Iran would be criminal aggression. And it would further intensify the current, terrible framework where for many in the Middle East and beyond, the "choices" they face are viewed as being between Islamic fundamentalism and US hegemonism. On the other hand, a movement that supports the Iranian people and opposes US expansionism could be part of bringing forward another way—the potential for a genuinely liberating force to get on the map. □□□