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Iran-France international Relations during Pahlavi Dynasty

Reza Khaledi

M.A. student in Political Sciences.

Abstract

Iran-France relations have been of ups and downs during history which was not limited to the Iranian Islamic Revolution. These relations are of a long history which dates back to the years before the contemporary era. France neither intervened in Iranian Constitutional Revolution nor motivated Russia and Great Britain to play role after the revolution. France announced its disagreement on the treaty when Ahmad Shah traveled to Paris. After termination of the capitulation in 1927 in Iran, France was the first European country to admit the termination. Consequently, the international relations between Iran and France got improved. The current study is aimed to focus on the Iran-France relations during Pahlavi dynasty.

Keywords: international relations, Iran and France, international relations during Pahlavi dynasty

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Introduction

Iran, occupied by creative and diligent people, is a sovereign state in western Asia which is unique in terms of geopolitical and geographical position as well as abundance of natural resources. But, it has not been able to find its deserved international political position. Iran, the country ruled by great empires including Sasanid, Safavid and Achaemenid dynasties has been under such pressure for the last centuries that has appealed to Germany, France or United States of America to get free from the animus of Russia and Great Britain. Why do Iranians, as a civilized and historical country have had to appeal to a third party as a mediator in political world at least for the recent century? According to Kenneth Waltz's theory of Structural Realism, international structure can be deemed as the most affective factor in foreign policies. According to the mentioned theory, unipolar, bipolar and multipolar structures are of divergent effects upon foreign policies and treatments. Accordingly, changes in international structure may lead to changes in foreign policies.

Before the fifth century, France was not an independent nation whose political relations were under the influence of the relations between Iran and Rome. Iranians first got to know Europe through France. Frank was the name of the tribe living in France and it may be the reason why Europe has been named "Farang" in Iranian literature. In the nineteenth century, French was adopted as the first foreign language of the Qajar court and official organizations. One of the most important reasons for expansion of French during the 20th century was French-speaking Belgians who were hired as custom officials. In the 1950s, French was the second language of Iranian educational system and also it was of a great use in political affairs. The early relations between Iran and France were of business and religious nature which had developed into more serious ones later. According to Waltz' book, *International Policies*, and with regard to his doctrine, the main reason is international structure not the nature of the governments. Before renaissance occurred in Europe, Iran was among the most powerful countries all over the world. But, after renaissance and treaty of Westphalia in 1648, center of power shifted from east to west. Western countries could hold their positions based on a realistic view in order to weaken and control other nations. Accordingly, western countries focused on Persia, a country with potential of growing into a world power, in order to prevent it from acting vital roles. Expansion of conflicts between two notable Islamic Powers, Safavid and Ottoman, the 1953 Iranian coup d'etat as well as defects in Iranian nuclear peace are to be investigated. Western policy of schism can be inferred from Napoleon: "Iran is a noble country laden with divine gifts. Iranians are sharp and brave people who deserve a well-organized ruling system…… the nations has been left to vanish from domestic division and schism." It seems that the great French general ignored the point that division seen in Iran has its roots in western policy of schism. It is worth noting that Napoleon played an unforgettable role towards this aim by signing Treaties of Tilsit in 1807.

The current study is aimed to study Iran-France international relations during Pahlavi dynasty. Pahlavi Shah focused on these relations to attract third party for reducing pressures put by Great Britain and Russia. The second aim of Shah for the last two decades was to redefine "west" in foreign policy discussions according to Russia and USA tension reduction policies. This study is organized in two chapters. The first chapter presents a historical literature of Iran-France relations while the second chapter focuses on Iran-France relations in political, cultural and economic affairs for the years of 1941-1978.

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Historical literature of Iran-France international relations

Since nineteenth century, Iran has been improving its relations with France in order to reduce political pressures enforced by Russia and Grate Britain. France, also has its own motives for development of relations with Iran. After World War I, Iran attempted to gain the support of France and USA for attending Versailles Treaty of Peace Conference. Some government officials tried to motivate France to hinder the conclusion and implementation of the1919 Anglo-Persian agreement. All in all, Iran-France relations were of undisturbed nature during the first years of Pahlavi dynasty. France admitting termination of 1927 capitulation led to reinforcement of its relations with Iran. A new agreement of reinforcement of Iran-France relations was signed in Tehran in on 30 June 1929. Two parties showed their interest in reinforcement of their relations. Also, the first cultural agreement between Iran and a foreign country was signed by Iran prime minister and France minister of culture in 1929 in Paris.

During the world war II and colonization of France, Iran-Vichy relations were under the support of German regime. But, after intervention of the alliances and breakage of Iran-Germany relations, Iran cut its relations with Vichy regime on March 30 of 1942. Iran government proclaimed provisional government of French Republic, founded by Charles Andre Joseph Marie de Gaulle, in 1944. It was on October of the same year that the mentioned government was stablished and Iran consulate was opened. After World War II, Iran-France relations improved due to mutual travels of the leaders of the two countries. Since 1970 up to Iranian Islamic Revolution, these two countries had signed multiple treaties and agreements with the centrality of cultural and commercial relations. French Republic is as vast as Iran is. This country has a unique geographical position which makes links between France, Manche channel, Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. These links provide France a useful marine transportation network. Iran-France international relations have undergone ups and downs since 1978. Since the year before Iranian Islamic Revolution up to 1988, Iran and France had friendly relations. But, after 1988, their relations were of hostile nature due to foreign policy orientations.

Beginning of Iran-Franc international relations

Beginning of Iran-France relations may date back to 1929 when a counselor was dispatched on behalf of Arqun Khan to Philippe Le Bel, king of France. According to the existing evidence and documents, Iran and France had friendly relations before the given dates. Up to the mid-19th century, there were multiple obstacles for Europeans to travel to Persia and for Persians travel to Europe. the objection of Ottoman empire and dangers of traveling were among the major problems. Despite the mentioned obstacles, French travelers traveled to Iran during Safavid Empire. These travelers published some books on their travel which attracted European interests in Iran (Babaei, 1999:23-63).

Iran-France International Relations during First Period of Pahlavi Dynasty (1921-1941)

It seems that France was of high importance in Iranian foreign policy during the period Reza Shah was Shah of Iran. Reza shah purchased some war tanks, war machines and aircrafts from western European countries to establish military force. He dispatched 47 army officers to a French army school in order to provide them with opportunity to continue their education (Mahdavi, 1995:24).

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One of the reasons why Iran-France cultural, political and military relations improved was attempts of Reza Shah to limit Great Britain in Iranian political affairs. To this end, France was the first European country to admit termination of capitulation by Reza Shah in 1927.

Iran-France cultural relations reached to a summit during the years of 1928-1936 (Azari, 2003:102). To confirm it, we can refer to the first official cultural agreement between Iran and France which concerned with equality of certificate of high school. The mentioned agreement was signed by these two governments in 1929. During Reza Shah reign, more than 90% of students continued their education in French Universities and colleges. But, these students faced some complications due to the inequality of educational standards and norms in Iran and France.

According to French references, 450 out of 600 Iranian students educated in Europe were financially supported by Iran government (Azari, 2003:72).

But, the most significant event occurred during Reza Shah reign was tensions between Iran and France which made their relations gloomy. In 1939, Iran-France relations revitalized again.

After Belgian custom officers lost their jobs, French press published articles in unfriendly and criticizing voice against Iran regime (Mahdavi, 1971:380).

Undoubtedly, one of the most noticeable reasons was that on January 1937, Paris newspaper entitled *Excelsoir* published a pictorial article about Iran and explicitly assaulted Reza Shah. These two countries lost their international relations for a year and a half, but in 1939, Albert Francois Leburn sent a committee led by Maxim Weygand, French military commander in Middle East, to attend the wedding party of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Fawzia Fuad and to apologize Reza Shah. Reza Shah accepted their apology and sent Anoushiravan Sepahbodi to Paris. It was then that their relations revitalized.

Some scholars believe that Maxim Weygant apologizing Reza Shah was a great sign of Iranian power for foreign countries to know that they were not allowed to ignore Iran. Additionally, it had such a great influence on sending Iranian students to France to continue their education that in 1937, Iran government decided to send Iranian students educated in France to another countries including Germany, Great Britain and Belgium.

Second part: study on Iran-France relations during 1941-1978

After World War II, Vichy regime was established and Iran consulate was controlled by Vichy in 1950. After Iran signed Treaty of alliance with Great Britain and USSR, Iran-Vichy relations broke down. In 1942, Iran government proclaimed French Committee of National Liberation formed by French General, Charles de Gaulle. In 1944, Zein-al Abedin Rahnamm was sent to Algeria as minister of Provisional government of French Republic. It was the same year when de Gaulle government established in Paris and Iran consulate transferred into Paris as well.

Meeting of Moahmmad Reza Shah and de Gaulle in 1944 was among the most affective changes in Iran-France international relations. It was their first meeting which concerned with reinforcement of political relations of the two involved countries. So, Iran consulate in Paris was promoted to embassy in 1945.

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Mohammad Reza Shah was officially invited by de Gaulle to visit France in 1961 which lead to 4-day de Gaulle travel to Iran in 1963. It seems that de Gaulle was aimed to reinforce French penetration in Middle East through his trip to Iran. Iran-France political relations were of friendly nature during de Gaulle presidency.

In 1969, Georges Pompidou was delegated power as French prime minister. It was the time when an Iranian committee of policy-makers and businessmen led by Mohammad Reza Shah traveled to France to stabilize Iran-France political relations. But, this meeting did not lead to any successful outcome due to liberalistic issues including attitudes of Georges Pompidou towards Human Law in Iran. He, Pompidou, did not accept the invitation to 2500-year celebration of Persian Empire in 1971. Instead, Jacques Chaban Delmas, French Gaullist politician served as prime minister under Pompidou, attended the Persepolis celebrations. Before these celebrations, Georges Pompidou sent his ambassador, Jacques Senar, to Iran. Senar got annoyed when he recognized that the president of South Africa occupied the seat of French president. Consequently, Pompidou sent his prime minister, Delmas (Houshang Mahdavi, 2008:169). Iran-France political relations got gloomy for a while due to Pompidou rejection of invitation and his unexperienced viewpoints. The first and the last time Pompidou visited Iran dates back to 1973. Actually, he visited Iran on his way back to France from Beijing. After Pompidou died and his successor, Valery Giscard d'Estaing known as VGE, served as President of French Republic, VGE officially invited Mohammad Reza Shah as the first political figure who visited France immediately after VGE elected as president (Azqandi, 1997:435).

One of the primary aims the newly elected president followed was to reinforce Iran-France political relations which were vanishing during Pompidou tenure. Consequently, multiple treaties and agreements were signed by these two governments which were in place until 1978. During those days Iranian Islamic Revolution was in progress, France played an opportunistic role.

However, French diplomats were aware of Iranian civil revolution in advance because French information agency was the first organization who had been informed of Shia movements against Pahlavi regime since 1973. It seems that French officials completely knew that Mohammad Reza Shah was suffering from an incurable disease because Mohammad Reza Shah was receiving medications from his French physicians. Since 1978 when Imam Komeini was exiled to France, Neauphle-le-Chateau, France revised its foreign policies and stepped away from Pahlavi regime.

Conclusion

The study on Iran-France relations in Pahlavi regime may lead to two points: one is the higher position of France in Iranian points of view and the second one is Iran and France preference for cultural relations compared to political or economical ones. Undoubtedly, ontology of the mentioned points may refer to many visits of Iran by French political figures, international structure and governmental structure in the form of cultural-values frameworks.

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