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INTRODUCTION

The United States must devise a means to develop Iran for the benefit of all its people.

T. Cuyler Young, 1950

Bruce Anderson was just trying to finish a master's degree in agricultural engineering at Utah State University (USU) in mid-1951 when he encountered an opportunity that changed his life. His research on an irrigation canal in Vernal had stalled when his adviser, Cleve Milligan, suggested that Bruce accompany him on a new venture USU was organizing halfway around the world in Iran. The university had agreed to send specialists to help the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture improve farm production, and Milligan had been chosen to head the project's engineering operation. He could use another irrigation specialist, and Anderson would no doubt find plenty of suitable research projects in that mostly arid country. As exciting as the prospect sounded, it also inspired "fear and trembling" in this married father of four who had difficulty finding the country on a map. Nevertheless, the families

of Bruce Anderson, Cleve Milligan, and three of their USU colleagues set off for Tehran that September.¹

The Anderson family spent most of the next decade living in Iran, first in and around the historic southern city of Shiraz and later in the sprawling capital of Tehran. Bruce and his wife, Lula's, youngest son, Mark, was born in Iran; the children attended an American school there. They witnessed an intense political crisis unfold between 1951 and 1953 that culminated in a fateful military coup that cast a long shadow on the country and shaped US-Iranian relations for a quarter century. They observed the country's grinding poverty, but they also experienced the warm hospitality of the Iranian people. Bruce's work took him to rural villages and to remote highland pastures of tribal nomads. He helped improve irrigation methods and assisted the government in organizing an agricultural extension service.² It was an "enriching and enlightening" experience, recalled Lula nearly four decades later, adding that in her estimation, "we did a lot of good."³

The work Anderson and dozens of his Utah colleagues did in Iran was part of the US government's Point Four initiative to provide technical assistance to poor countries that seemed susceptible to communist influence. Driving this new approach to foreign policy was a firm belief that American influence, including technical know-how, would naturally promote economic prosperity while also incubating democracy around the world.⁴ Its original architects in the Truman administration conceived Point Four as a low-cost program of on-the-ground teaching and demonstration in which American advisers would work directly with the people of host countries to improve the quality of life in rural communities. The goal was to demonstrate the superiority of the American way and thereby blunt the appeal of international communism. Its first director, Henry Bennett, called Point Four "a 'down-to-earth' method of working which brings modern methods to the villagers in a form readily understood by them and easily adapted to their problems."⁵ Sociologists and historians have sometimes used terms such as "low modernization" and "development through citizen participation" that highlight the emphasis on small-scale, locally directed projects.⁶

This book tells the story of how three Utah universities—Brigham Young University (BYU), the University of Utah, and USU—contributed to Point Four technical assistance in Iran between 1951 and 1964. The Utah projects generally fit within Point Four's original low-modernization framework,

though some stretched the limits of that approach. They contrast with the more familiar stories of foreign aid that often stress large-scale modernization and generous military grants the US government doled out to help stabilize friendly governments. The grandiose visions of modernization theorists in particular, with their compressive plans and faith that superhighways and hydroelectric dams would propel non-Western societies toward an age of mass consumption, came to dominate American development thinking by the second half of the 1950s and remained prominent throughout most of the 1960s.⁷ This “high modernization” has therefore commanded the bulk of attention historians have directed toward understanding economic development as a component of American foreign policy during the Cold War.⁸ One objective of this book, then, is to direct attention back to the smaller localized projects that preceded the ascendancy of modernization theory and ambitious seven-year development plans.⁹

A second major aim of this book is to examine an important link between American higher education and international development. American colleges and universities emerged as prominent partners in the dissemination of technical aid during the 1950s. They employed top scientists who conducted vital research in fields that were at the heart of socioeconomic development. Influential academic leaders promoted the Point Four Program, either out of a sense of patriotism or with an eye toward enhancing their institutions’ global reach. Many individuals who participated, including Bruce Anderson and his USU colleagues, wanted to do something beneficial for the people of less developed countries. In all, more than seventy American universities supported technical assistance projects through Point Four and its successor, the US Agency for International Development (USAID, or AID), during the 1950s and 1960s. This book focuses on three of them. Utah State University held four Point Four agricultural contracts in Iran and maintained a continuous presence in that country between 1951 and 1964. BYU sent two teams of advisers to assist in the modernization of Iranian education, one from 1951 through 1955 that emphasized teacher training and another between 1957 and 1961 that helped modernize Iran’s National Teacher’s College, Daneshsaraye Ali, in Tehran. The University of Utah also sent a small team of public health advisers to Iran between 1951 and 1956. Taken together, the Utah projects represent a cross-section of university contributions to US technical assistance, an aspect of early Cold War foreign policy historians have so far left unexplored.

Point Four technical advisers represented the US government and became ambassadors for the American way of life. The Utahans wholeheartedly believed their work would uplift Iranians while striking a blow against the dangerous march of international communism. They approached that work with sincerity and enthusiasm. The missionary spirit of the Latter-day Saints community, to which most of the Utah families belonged, encouraged and sustained them. But theirs was not a religious mission; rather, it was a mission for socioeconomic development. Larry Grubbs has called the academics and technical experts who carried out American development schemes in Africa at the same time “secular missionaries,” and most of the characteristics he identifies with those individuals—a high level of personal commitment, faith that Western science and technology could solve a wide range of poverty problems, and a strong belief in American exceptionalism—were also present in the Utah advisers.¹⁰ Dedication to the job, honesty, and clean living helped the Utahns connect with their Iranian partners and made them stand apart from the many American diplomats who became notorious for carousing and careerism. They displayed a humanitarian spirit that led them to leave the comforts of middle-class American life and serve impoverished people in a remote, strange, and often intimidating land, confident that their own experience in transforming the American West qualified them for the task.

A third purpose of this book is to explain why Point Four achieved only limited success in Iran. Americans believed their abundance of technical knowledge would help underdeveloped nations achieve efficient and peaceful economic development, but that did not happen in Iran and many other countries. The program was modest in scope and could do little more than provide a primer for Iranian development in a few select fields. While American advisers possessed an abundance of technical knowledge, they lacked a deep understanding of Iranian culture and society. Despite their good intentions, then, technical advisers faced a steep learning curve. From negotiating with cabinet ministers and village leaders to living and working in a country where clean water and paved roads were still rare, they encountered a bewildering array of challenges. Like all technical experts, the Utahns had to show patience and flexibility. Projects that displayed too much American influence or that pushed too strongly to Americanize Iranian practices often met resistance, especially in education. Even when they enjoyed Iranian support, Point Four advisers operated amid myriad bureaucratic obstacles that

limited their effectiveness, including instability and inefficiency within the Iranian government and a frustrating lack of continuity in US foreign aid policies. The onset of a process known as integration further undermined technical assistance in 1956. Integration sought to reduce American costs and commitments by having Iranians take over more of the planning and execution of the projects, that is, integrate them more fully into Iranian development schemes, while American advisers continued to provide technical support. Unfortunately, many Point Four projects floundered under Iranian control during the second half of the 1950s.

Point Four was never a very high priority for the US government. While it was much smaller than most other Cold War foreign aid programs, many conservatives nevertheless dismissed it as wishful thinking and a wasteful misallocation of tax dollars. To provide some fiscal perspective, Congress allocated just under \$150 million to the program in 1952 while spending \$6 billion on military assistance that year and more than \$13 billion on the reconstruction of Western Europe, the Marshall Plan, between 1948 and 1952.¹¹ The US government's total commitment to technical aid in Iran amounted to about \$120 million between 1951 and 1967, or approximately half of 1 percent of all US foreign aid to that country during those years.¹² The US government put much more emphasis on using foreign aid to preserve friendly regimes around the world than it put on Point Four's belief that democratic socioeconomic development would lead to a more peaceful world. To put it plainly, Point Four's goal was to achieve stability *through* democratic development, but American foreign policy makers prioritized stability *over* democratic development.¹³ That is not to say that US leaders ignored Point Four's goals altogether; they clearly recognized that rampant poverty and political repression left many countries, including Iran, unstable and susceptible to communist influence. But the first priority was to protect friendly anti-communist regimes. Point Four's low-modernization approach to development became less significant in Iran by the mid-1950s as the overriding American goals shifted to bolstering the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and assisting large-scale infrastructure and industrial projects.

A final goal of this book is to explore how the Utahns both understood and misunderstood the relationship that developed between the United States and Iran from the mid-1950s through the late 1970s. The first Utahns arrived in Iran during pivotal years when the country became more significant to US

foreign policy. Washington's interest stemmed from the growing importance of Persian Gulf oil, from the country's strategic location along the southern border of the Soviet Union, and from a fear that communist activity was increasing.¹⁴ The early 1950s marked a watershed moment when Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh rallied Iranian nationalists in a campaign to wrest control of the country's greatest natural resource from the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The resulting oil nationalization controversy plunged Iran into a crisis that British and American leaders feared would embolden Iranian communists and perhaps the Soviet Union itself. In August 1953 they supported a military coup that removed Mossadegh from power. Like many American leaders, the Utahns welcomed the ouster of a leader they came to see as too chaotic and too tolerant of communism. The 1953 coup marked a major turning point in US-Iranian relations. US policy makers threw their lot in with the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the shah who ruled Iran from 1941 until 1979.

Though the Utahns felt great sympathy for the Iranian people, their reading of Iran's development under the shah proved flawed. While the Utahns celebrated the overthrow of Mossadegh as a necessary step in restoring stability and democracy, Iranians came to see it as a case of foreign powers thwarting their national sovereignty. The Utah advisers applauded as the shah led Iran through a period of tremendous economic growth during the 1960s, but many Iranians resented his increasingly authoritarian leadership and the chaotic nature of Iran's economic development. Moreover, American intelligence agents helped train his notorious secret police, SAVAK, and supplied the regime with lavish military aid that the shah often used to suppress dissent. This book draws on the experience of the Utah advisers to explain how Americans misread the era of the shah's modernizing dictatorship between 1953 and 1979.

IRAN AND THE WEST BEFORE 1950

Iran is one of the world's oldest civilizations, though few Americans paid much attention to it before the Cold War. Some could probably recall school lessons about its great ancient history: the massive Persian Empire that Cyrus and Darius built five centuries before the birth of Christ followed by the epic wars with Greece and subsequent conquest by Alexander the Great. More worldly

Americans might be acquainted with the country's distinguished medieval poets or its beautiful carpets and architecture. But Iran was far removed from American commercial and diplomatic concerns. The United States did not establish formal diplomatic relations with the Iranian government until 1883, and the US Department of State did not appoint a desk officer for the country until World War II. American diplomacy largely restricted itself to protecting scattered missionaries and overseeing the little business transacted between the two countries.¹⁵

The once-great nation fell on hard times during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Russian expansion toward the Persian Gulf absorbed much of the Caucasus region between the Black and Caspian Seas by 1830; the czar's armies extended Russian power over the vast Asian steppe on Iran's northern border by the end of the 1870s. The Iranian government had to accept humiliating treaties in 1813 and 1828 that made Russia master of the Caspian Sea and gave Russian citizens immunity from Iranian prosecution. This history of Russian aggrandizement at Iran's expense loomed large in American thinking about the Middle East during the Cold War. Britain likewise expanded its presence in Afghanistan and along the Persian Gulf during the nineteenth century to strengthen its control of the approaches to India and deny Russia access to the Indian Ocean. Fearing the growth of German influence in Iran immediately before World War I, the Russians and British put their "Great Game" rivalry on hold in 1907 to divide Iran into spheres of influence. Russia entrenched itself as the dominant power in the north, while Britain became practically sovereign in the southeast around the strategic strait at Hormuz where the Persian Gulf empties into the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the extravagant but feeble Iranian government squandered the nation's wealth on lavish royal trips abroad and by selling to British and Russian investors the rights to exploit key sectors of the economy. The grand prize of these foreign concessions went to William Knox D'Arcy, a British businessman who made his fortune in mining and land speculation. In 1901 D'Arcy acquired the sole right to explore for oil in most of Iran for sixty years. In return, he paid less than \$100,000 in cash—a modest sum even in 1901—granted the shah another \$100,000 worth of stock, and promised the Iranian government 16 percent of future petroleum profits. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company [AIOC] in 1935 and now

British Petroleum [BP]) bought the concession in 1908 and retained control over all aspects of the Iranian oil industry for the next half century. The British government acquired a controlling share of the AIOC in 1914, and the company soon emerged as the United Kingdom's most valuable foreign asset.¹⁷ Other agreements gave British or Russian interests almost complete control over banking, mining, communications, and public finance.¹⁸ As a consequence of these foreign concessions, few Iranians learned the technical skills necessary to build a modern country. Moreover, European exploitation of the nation's economy inspired Iranian antipathy toward the West.

British and Russian operatives blocked several attempts at meaningful reforms in Iran during the first half of the twentieth century. Popular dissolution with the country's plunge toward colonial servitude culminated in a constitutional revolution that produced Iran's first elected parliament (Majlis) the fall of 1906. But Mohammad Ali Shah (r. 1907–9) sought Russian help in squashing the revolution. He ordered the Russian-led Cossack Brigade to bombard the Majlis building in the summer of 1908, and Russian forces occupied Tabriz, a city in northern Iran to which the constitutionalists fled, the following spring.¹⁹ When Reza Shah (r. 1925–41) attempted to cancel the British oil concession in 1932, Anglo-Persian executives agreed to increase the Iranian government's share of profits and royalties, but they retained complete ownership and control of the company.²⁰

The Bolshevik Revolution raised Western fears that Russian communists would export their ideology to Iran. Iranian socialists formed a Justice Party at Baku across the Russian border in 1917 and renamed it the Communist Party of Iran in 1920. The party sent delegates to the Sixth Bolshevik Congress, organized workers, recruited for the Red Army, smuggled socialist newspapers into Iran, and supported a socialist republic in the province of Gilan on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. Leftist ideas continued to circulate, especially in Tehran and Tabriz, during the interwar years despite Reza Shah's concerted attempts to stamp them out. A socialist party began organizing the lower classes in 1921. One of its leaders, Sulayman Iskandari, became the first chairman of the pro-Soviet Tudeh (Masses) Party, which was formed in 1941 and became the focal point of Anglo-American fears about communism in Iran during the 1950s.²¹

Though Iran was remote from US government interests before World War II, a handful of American missionaries had been active since the 1830s

ministering to the Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities and building hospitals and schools. The Church Missionary Society established a hospital outside Isfahan in 1875.²² Dr. Adelaide Kibbe Frame Hoffman, a Presbyterian missionary, worked as a physician in Iran from 1929 until 1957, primarily in Mashhad and Rasht.²³ Presbyterian missionaries founded a boys' school in Tehran, later Alborz College, in 1871. American missionary schools, according to historian Robert Daniel, "provided an indispensable institution for modern society" and began to attract the sons of leading Iranians by the turn of the twentieth century.²⁴ Dr. Samuel Jordan, who along with his wife, Mary, taught at the school for more than forty years, could boast by the 1930s that "probably no other school in the world has ever enrolled so many of the children of the leading men of any country."²⁵ American missionaries also helped pioneer practical education for girls, especially in home economics, in an era that offered few other educational opportunities for them.²⁶ Historian Monica Ringer writes that missionary girls' schools were "significant for the impetus they provided to women's education" because they "viewed women's education as a means of improving general living standards."²⁷ Jane Doolittle, a missionary who "dedicated her life to furthering the education and health of the Iranian people," served as principal of the Presbyterian girls' school in Tehran for more than four decades, between 1925 and 1968.²⁸

Americans also contributed to other aspects of Iranian development that anticipated Point Four technical assistance. In 1911, for example, the Iranian government hired W. Morgan Shuster to reorganize the country's finances. Anglo-Russian pressure truncated that effort, which led Shuster to write a scathing criticism of British and Russian imperialism titled *The Strangling of Persia*.²⁹ Arthur Millspaugh, a former college professor and trade adviser to the Department of State, spent five years in Iran during the 1920s reorganizing tax collections at the request of Reza Shah. A second Millspaugh mission during World War II tried to create order from the endemic corruption within the Iranian government. He was a sincere and principled civil servant, but his rigid manner made him many enemies among the Iranian elite. Millspaugh, according to historian James Bill, "drove an American-made bulldozer into the Iranian labyrinth." His efforts bore little fruit.³⁰ Finally, the Near East Foundation (NEF) emerged as a major philanthropic organization in Iran by the 1940s. It grew out of American missionary relief to victims of the Armenian Genocide during World War I.³¹ In 1946 the NEF pioneered

a rural improvement program in northwest Iran that embraced the same low-modernization techniques in agriculture, education, and public health that would characterize Point Four work in the next decade.³²

IRAN AND US FOREIGN POLICY

World War II and the onset of the Cold War made Iran much more important to American foreign policy. The Allies wanted to keep German forces out of Middle East oilfields, and Iran's position along the Persian Gulf made it an important supply conduit to the Soviet Union.³³ In January 1943 the Department of State endorsed a memorandum written by its Iran desk officer, John Jernegan, urging that the United States provide Iran with "American specialists and application of American methods in various fields." He believed that preserving Iranian independence after the war would be important to American strategic interests and that the United States should therefore assist the country's economic development.³⁴ The substance of the memorandum reached President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who gave it an informal endorsement. The US government subsequently promised Iran "such economic assistance as may be available" as part of an Allied Tripartite Declaration on Iran.³⁵ Jernegan's memorandum proved prophetic, as Iran was at the center of an early Cold War showdown in early 1946. The Allied powers had all agreed to withdraw their troops from Iran within six months of the end of the war. The United States and United Kingdom complied; the Soviet Union did not. Instead, Joseph Stalin hoped to use the Soviet presence to leverage an oil concession out of the Iranian government. Meanwhile, Soviet troops encouraged separatist republics in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. The Truman administration denounced the Soviet behavior as imperialism, and Iranian prime minister Ahmad Qavam negotiated an oil agreement that he knew the Majlis would not ratify. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops from northern Iran in May 1946, but the episode left US and Iranian leaders deeply suspicious of Soviet intentions.³⁶

In January 1950 historian T. Cuyler Young offered an analysis of the situation in Iran that was designed to show Americans how important Truman's Point Four proposal could be for that country. World War II brought crippling inflation and extensive economic dislocation as the Allied occupation forces commandeered much of the country's agricultural output. The government

of the young Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was struggling to implement basic measures to improve quality of life, such as expanding public education and controlling malaria, but it lacked resources and dedicated civil servants. Powerful politicians, landlords, and clergymen opposed meaningful democratic reforms. Meanwhile, Young warned, the Soviet Union still viewed the country as a target of influence and possibly of expansion.³⁷ George McGhee of the Department of State was even more direct: “We can be sure that the Kremlin is losing no opportunity to fish in the troubled water of Iran.”³⁸ For Young, the challenge required a robust American response. “The United States must devise a means,” he concluded, “to develop Iran for the benefit of all its people.”³⁹ Once remote from American interests, Iran had suddenly become a focal point of US strategic thinking.

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