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The Washington Merry-go-round

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Did Shah manipulate our foreign policy?

WASHINGTON — Out of the Iranian cesspool, an ugly question has bubbled to the surface? Did the shah of Iran use his oil billions to manipulate American policy?

Sources close to the deposed shah tell me he used to operate a subterranean system of graft, kickbacks and payoffs that extended from his palace guard to some of the mullahs who now oppose him. The same sources claim his foreign policy, too, was based on bribery, graft and manipulation.

A startling array of prominent Americans were on his gift list. His man in Washington, Ardeshir Zahedi, dispensed envelopes stuffed with cash, Persian rugs, expensive jewelry, Longines watches, cans of caviar, bottles of champagne and the services of prostitutes. For top officials, there were even juicier enticements. Consider these conflicts of interest:

CASE NO. 1 — The shah, seeking money to finance his dreams of empire, became the driving force behind the astronomical leap in oil prices. Saudi Arabia, however, offered to block the ruinous 1974 price rise if the Nixon administration would intervene with the shah.

Top secret documents show that the administration's foreign policy star, Henry Kissinger, was responsible for blocking any interference with the shah. So with Kissinger's connivance, the great oil gouge began.

Soon the oil billions began pouring into the shah's coffers, much of it by way of the Rockefeller-run Chase Manhattan Bank. The shah also bestowed other multibillion-dollar benefits on the Rockefeller interests ranging from oil deals to real estate ventures.

It's no big secret that Kissinger came to prominence through the Rockefeller route. His biographers, Marvin and Bernard Kalb, describe him as "one of the crown jewels in the Rockefeller diadem." After guiding U.S. foreign policy for eight years, Kissinger return-

ed to the Rockefeller fold where he is now advising Chase Manhattan on foreign investments.

CASE NO. 2 — William Rogers was secretary of state when the decision was reached to build up the shah as protector of American interests in the Persian Gulf area, rather than face the difficulties of having the United States look after these interests more directly.

Rogers joined in the process of arming the shah to the teeth, flattering him to the ears and commiserating with him over his revenue problems in bankrolling the vast responsibilities Washington had encouraged him to undertake.

Within three months after Rogers left the State Department in late 1973, he turned up as a director of the shah's Pahlavi Foundation. Rogers' law firm was also retained by the shah.

CASE NO. 3 — No American ambassador could have been more solicitous toward the shah than was Richard Helms. As ambassador to Iran during the crucial 1973-77 period, Helms behaved as if he were representing the shah, rather than the American people.

In one classified cable, he urged the State Department to "tidy up as much as possible anti-shah elements in U.S." before a visit from the shah. Helms also asked whether an anti-shah newspaper in Washington could be closed down. The department's lawyers replied that the paper was protected by the First Amendment.

When Helms finally resigned as ambassador, he told colleagues at the embassy that he was leaving "to make some money." Not long afterward, he quietly opened a consulting firm in Washington for the ostensible purpose of serving as a "go between" for foreign interests seeking to do business in the United States. He called his firm "Safeer," the Iranian word for "ambassador."

His biggest spending client — you guessed it — was Shah Mohammed Reza

Pahlavi. One of Helms' assignments was to find a suitable estate for the shah in the Virginia countryside. Helms submitted appraisals of five palatial, multimillion-dollar estates. This message was received about one of them: "I think the shah would really enjoy this estate," with a description of the antique and classical furniture.

CASE NO. 4 — Sen. Jacob Javits, R-N.Y., a power on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, became one of the Senate's most stalwart champions of the shah. After the shah was ousted and condemned to death by the new revolutionary government, Javits helped push through a Senate resolution assailing the shah's death sentence.

This Senate resolution, according to Iranian sources, helped to persuade Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that the United States was unalterably committed to the shah, thus heightening the distrust and hostility that precipitated the Iranian crisis.

Back in 1974, the Senator's wife, Marion Javits, quietly signed on as a \$67,500 public relations consultant to Iran Air. Confidential papers show that the shah's aides considered this a cover for a pro-shah lobbying effort. The papers note, among other political observations, her husband's "great influence" in the Senate.

The papers indicate that the shah shelled out \$507,000 to the Senator's wife. This not only is far more than she acknowledged receiving, but she also disclaims knowledge of any intent to use her as a lobbyist. She looked upon her work for the shah strictly as cultural and commercial, she said. But she resigned after the press exposed her financial ties to the shah.

Footnote: Both Rogers and Helms had "no comment." Kissinger denied that the Rockefeller-shah financial ties ever influenced his foreign policy judgments. He had no knowledge of their business dealings, he said, at the time of the 1974 price negotiations.