

THE CANDLE THAT LIT THE FLAME: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE ORIGINS OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Lecture by Dr. Roham Alvandi

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Most historians trace the immediate origins of the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution to the decision by the last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to launch an ill-fated ‘liberalization’ effort in 1977 that emboldened the opposition to his rule. This policy is often ascribed to the pressure exerted on the Shah by U.S. President Jimmy Carter. In this lecture Dr. Roham Alvandi traces the origins of the Shah’s liberalization to the transnational human rights campaign that targeted Pahlavi Iran in the 1970s, led by Amnesty International. Drawing on the records of Amnesty’s International Secretariat, as well as the private papers and memoirs of Iranian officials and activists, Dr. Alvandi examines both the significance of Iran for the human rights revolution of the 1970s, as well as the role of human rights in the origins of the Iranian Revolution.

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