



Matthew K. Shannon. *Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education during the Cold War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017. 256 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-1313-2.

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Matthew Shannon's *Losing Hearts and Minds* is a welcome addition to a new wave of work on the United States' relationship with Iran in the decades of the 1960s and 70s.[1] While much of this work is concerned with the vicissitudes of the United States' Cold War alliance with the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shannon's work focuses on transnational relations between Iranians and Americans through the lens of international education. The central argument of *Losing Hearts and Minds* is that the presence of large numbers of Iranian students on American university campuses in the 1960s and '70s led to the creation of an "alternate" US-Iran alliance between the Iranian student opposition abroad and Americans who were critical of Washington's support for the authoritarian rule of Mohammad Reza Shah. This alternate transnational US-Iran alliance worked to undermine the shah's public image in the United States as a modernizing monarch by highlighting the human rights abuses of Iran's security service, SAVAK. Shannon argues that the existence of this alternate alliance demonstrates that "there was nothing inevitable about thirty-seven years of U.S. support for the Shah of Iran" (p. 3). Successive American administrations could have chosen to heed the calls of Iranian students and their American sympathizers to

end American support for the shah, Shannon argues, but they refused to do so, with disastrous consequences for both the United States and Iran following the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution.

Losing Hearts and Minds sits comfortably within a well-established historical narrative of the failures of US policy towards Iran, beginning with the original sin of the CIA-backed August 1953 royalist coup that toppled Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq and ending with the American diplomats taken hostage in Tehran in November 1979. Shannon picks up the baton from an earlier generation of scholars of American foreign relations, notably James Bill and Richard Cottam, who were intimately familiar with Iran and sympathetic to the pro-Mosaddeq secular liberal opposition to the shah.[2] Unlike this earlier generation, Shannon has the benefit of distance from these historical events and access to archives that allow him to delve far more deeply into the history of US-Iran relations. Shannon has mined nineteen different archives in the United States, spanning not only the National Archives and the presidential libraries, but also collections of private papers scattered across the country, as well as the UK National Archives in London. However, Persian-language primary and secondary sources are entirely absent from Shannon's work, leading to a

misreading of the Iranian student Left that detracts from an otherwise excellent book.

The narrative arc of *Losing Hearts and Minds* begins with the impact of American educators in Iran, rather than the impact of Iranian students in the United States. Here Shannon examines the many ways that American-funded education and training was at the core of modernization efforts under the Pahlavi monarchy in the 1950s. He makes an important contribution to a growing body of work on modernization and US-Iran relations, focusing not only on government-funded initiatives such as President Harry Truman's Point Four Program, or the military and security training provided by the Dwight Eisenhower administration to the Iranian military and SAVAK following the 1953 coup, but also nongovernmental actors such as the Ford Foundation and the American Friends of the Middle East. These modernization efforts fueled the ranks of Iran's growing technocratic urban middle class, who in turn increasingly looked to an American university education as the key to participating in the modernization of their country and the advancement of their own social and economic ambitions. He credits key American-educated technocrats like Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, who served as director of the Plan Organization and governor of the Central Bank, with shaping Iranian modernization despite their frustrations with both the shah and US policy in Iran.

Shannon highlights the divergence between two different visions of modernization for Iran in the early 1960s. The dominant vision was authoritarian modernization, which was a central pillar of the US-Iran alliance. The United States ignored the shah's trampling of the Iranian constitution, which placed parliamentary constraints on the monarch, because Washington favored a strong centralized Pahlavi state that could carry out needed reforms while keeping Iran and the Persian Gulf out of the clutches of the Soviet Union and Iran's communist Tudeh Party. An alternative

vision of modernization, which Shannon calls "free-speech modernism," was propounded by a younger generation of Iranians for whom Mosaddeq was an enduring symbol of Iran's parliamentary democracy (p. 46). For these free-speech modernists, the path to Iran's modernization lay through liberty, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, in the tradition of Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11. The Iranian Students Association in the United States (ISAUS), which was founded just months after the 1953 coup, quickly became a bastion of pro-Mosaddeq students like Ali Fatemi, a nephew of Mosaddeq's foreign minister, and Sadeq Qotbzadeh, who would go on to serve as one of Ayatollah Khomeini's lieutenants and foreign minister of the Islamic Republic. These free-speech modernists would never tire of pointing out the incongruity between the constitutionally protected freedoms that Americans enjoyed at home and the United States' support for the shah's unconstitutional rule in Iran.

Building on the work of James Goode, Shannon identifies a "window for reform" in Iran between 1961 and 1963, when the free-speech modernists found new allies in Washington in the form of Supreme Court Justice William Douglas and Attorney General Robert Kennedy.[3] Facing political and economic crises at home, the shah seemed to be in retreat, appointing the independent Ali Amini as prime minister in 1961 and heeding Washington's calls for reform. This was the moment, Shannon argues, when the United States could have listened to these Iranian students and backed the remnants of Mosaddeq's liberal secular National Front, which Shannon describes as "a viable and democratic alternative to Pahlavi rule," but instead chose to first support Amini's reform program, and after his resignation in 1962, the shah's White Revolution of social and economic reforms (p. 66).

Shannon's well-researched telling of this episode is the most detailed yet of the efforts of the ISAUS, Justice Douglas, and the president's

brother, Robert Kennedy, to influence John Kennedy's thinking on Iran. In Shannon's view, these free-speech modernists got it right, whereas authoritarian modernizers in the Kennedy administration, especially Kennedy's advisor Robert "Blowtorch Bob" Komer, got it wrong. For Shannon, this was a choice between idealism and realism, and sadly, the former triumphed over the latter. Yet, Shannon's critique of the realists overlooks the regional context for the administration's decision-making. The Iraqi monarchy was violently toppled in a coup in the summer of 1958 by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim. That same year, the shah uncovered a coup plot by the head of Iranian military intelligence, General Valiollah Qarani. In 1960, the Turkish military overthrew Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in a military coup, and two years later Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal carried out a coup against the Imam of Yemen. Events in the region seemed to portend doom for the Peacock throne of Iran, which was destined to follow these toppled monarchies into the dustbin of history. Realists like Komer had little faith that the National Front and Iran's constitutional institutions would be strong enough to hold the country together if the shah were overthrown. They feared that either the Soviet-backed Tudeh or a military strongman like the first chief of SAVAK, General Teymour Bakhtiar, whom the shah dismissed in 1961 for attempting to conspire against him with the Americans, would seize power. Not surprisingly, they chose not to tempt fate.

As Iran's modernizing economy grew dramatically in the 1960s and 70s, so too did the shah's intolerance of any form of dissent. International education was at the heart of this modernization effort. However, as Shannon highlights, providing Iranians with a foreign education also had the subversive effect of transplanting Iranian politics from Tehran to anywhere in the world with a large Iranian student community, particularly the United States. While we have at least two detailed studies of the Iranian student opposition abroad, Shannon's book is the first to substantially discuss

their impact on debates within the United States about Iran throughout the 1960s and 70s.[4] As Shannon eloquently demonstrates, Iranian students unrelentingly embarrassed the shah at every turn, from picketing his visits to the United States to providing information on political prisoners to journalists and human rights activists, thereby changing the conversation in the United States from the achievements of the shah's White Revolution to the torture employed by SAVAK in Iran's prisons. They certainly benefited from a receptive audience in the 1970s, when the "human rights revolution" was taking place and when American consumers were already angered by the shah's role in increasing prices at the petrol pump.[5]

The weakness of Shannon's study is his lack of attention to the experiences of these Iranian students on American university campuses. While Shannon acknowledges the increasing radicalization of the Iranian student Left in the late 1960s, particularly the growing popularity of Maoism within the Confederation of Iranian Students – National Union (CISNU), he does not tell us much about their experience of being in the United States in the era of the civil rights movement, Vietnam, and Watergate. Were Iranian students radicalized by the bonds of solidarity they forged with other students in the United States, as they were for example in West Germany?[6] What impact did the militant Black Power movement have on these Iranian students?[7] One particularly glaring omission is any discussion of the experience of Iranian women students in the United States or the attitudes of Iranian students towards feminism and women's rights. A more critical reading of the Iranian student Left would have emerged from Shannon's book if he had addressed the contentious debates amongst Iranians on women's rights, which some on the Iranian left regarded as the "petty bourgeois' concerns of 'Westernized' women." [8]

Shannon acknowledges the increasing militancy of the Iranian student movement throughout the decade of the 1960s. “By 1968,” Shannon writes, “the Iranian student movement abroad was integral to New Left activism” (pp. 85-86). Nonetheless, he downplays their militancy, quoting sociologist Peyman Vahabzadeh who contends that Iranian students were “obliquely enlivened by a democratic impulse that was cloaked under the revolutionary discursive mantle of the time” (p. 13). But what if these students were, in fact, enlivened by a revolutionary anti-imperialism that was cloaked under the human rights discursive mantle of the time? Shannon cites the English-language publications of these students, which were intended to sway an American audience with appeals to human rights, while overlooking their Persian-language publications, which were filled with praise for violent guerrilla groups in Iran and throughout the Third World. The dominant ideology of the Iranian student Left in the 1970s was not liberalism, constitutionalism, and individual human rights. For them, such bourgeois ideas had perished with Mosaddeq’s government in 1953. Instead, young Iranians were turning to a concoction of revolutionary anti-imperialism, Third Worldism, and Iranian nativism, with which Shannon does not adequately engage.[9] He dedicates a single paragraph to Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s influential notion of “Westoxification” (p. 116) while Ali Shariati, who offered Iranian students an Islamist reading of Frantz Fanon and is considered by many the ideological father of the Iranian Revolution, merits only one mention in passing (p. 147).[10] As for Ayatollah Khomeini, his relationship with the student movement is not discussed until the conclusion, where Shannon writes that “the CISNU and Khomeini lived in different ideological worlds, but each side understood the other’s utility” (p. 143). Only by privileging revolutionary expediency over say, the human rights of Iranian women, could students forge such an alliance of convenience with Khomeini in the name of fighting imperialism.[11] Shannon is

right to argue that “concepts such as human rights and freedom are malleable,” but the reader is left wondering what these students understood human rights to mean (p. 159).[12]

In *Losing Hearts and Minds*, Shannon has challenged historians of US-Iran relations to think beyond diplomatic history and consider the transnational. He has done the field a great service by pushing the boundaries of this historiography and by writing the names of American-educated technocrats and activists like Khodadad Farmanfarmaian and Ali Fatemi into the historical narrative of US-Iran relations. However, Shannon has largely sought to recover Iranian voices from American sources, which is problematic. The absence of any Persian-language sources in the book, of which there is an abundance to work with outside of Iran in the form of document archives, periodicals, published memoirs, and oral history collections, means that what we generally encounter in Shannon’s work are the voices of Iranian students speaking to Americans in English, often in the language of individual human rights, rather than Iranian students debating one another in Persian, often in the language of revolution and armed struggle.[13]

Running throughout *Losing Hearts and Minds* is a counterfactual history of US-Iran relations that imagines the United States heeding the calls of Iranian students to abandon the shah and support the cause of constitutionalism as an enlightened path to Iranian modernity. This counterfactual history never came to pass, Shannon argues, because “the persistence of developmentalist thinking prevented U.S. officials from seeing Iran’s oppositionists as anything other than reactionaries, or, in the case of leftist students abroad, ‘immature’ subversives to be silenced” (p. 159). In his effort to challenge this developmentalist thinking, and without the benefit of access to Persian-language sources, Shannon misreads the Iranian student opposition. Like an earlier generation of American scholars, he wonders how an opposi-

tion movement for human rights could have ended in the human rights abuses of the revolutionary Islamic Republic. His answer is that “after the fall of the Pahlavis, Khomeini spoke about freedom, but not freedom of expression and thought, or freedom from despotism. Freedom from exploitation and imperialism became the dominant tropes in Iran’s revolutionary discourse” (p. 160). In fact, this was not just a postrevolutionary development or an invention of Khomeini. It was the product of a Third Worldist anti-imperialism that the Iranian student Left joyfully embraced on university campuses in Iran, Europe, and the United States in the 1960s and 70s.

Notwithstanding its limitations in terms of Persian-language sources, *Losing Hearts and Minds* is an important intervention in the historiography of US-Iran relations. Shannon’s work has broadened our gaze beyond diplomats, soldiers, and spies, in order to consider the significance of activists, students, and technocrats, amongst others, in shaping the relationship between Iran and the United States. In doing so, Shannon has brought the study of this relationship into line with the broader transnational turn in the study of “America and the World,” particularly the burgeoning historiography on human rights activism and American foreign relations.[14] This is a long-overdue development that will no doubt influence the future trajectory of the historiography, particularly as historians of US-Iran relations look ahead to the fortieth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution in 2019.

Notes

[1]. Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Claudia Castiglioni, “No Longer a Client, Not Yet a Partner: The US-Iranian Alliance in the Johnson Years,” *Cold War History* 15, no. 4 (2015): 491-509; David R. Collier, *Democracy and the Nature of American Influence in Iran, 1941-1979* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017); Andrew

Scott Cooper, *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016); Ben Offler, *US Foreign Policy and the Modernization of Iran: Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and the Shah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Stephen McGlinchey, *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah’s Iran* (London: Routledge, 2014); Christian Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution: The Cold War Dynamics of Engagement and Strategic Alliance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Javier Gil Guerrero, *The Carter Administration and the Fall of Iran’s Pahlavi Dynasty: US-Iran Relations on the Brink of the 1979 Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[2]. James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); and Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

[3]. James F. Goode, “Reforming Iran during the Kennedy Years,” *Diplomatic History* 15 (1991): 13-29; and James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Musaddiq* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

[4]. Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2002); and Ḥamid Shawkat, *Junbish-i dānishjuyī-i Kunfidrāsiyūn-i Jahānī-i Muḥaṣṣalīn va Dānishjuyān-i Irānī (Ittiḥādīyah-i Millī)* [History of the Confederation of Iranian Students (National Union)], 2 vols. (Tehran: Nāmak, 1391 [2013]).

[5]. See Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[6]. See Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 100-34.

[7]. See Manijeh Nasrabadi and Afshin Matin-Asgari, “The Iranian Student Movement and the Making of Global 1968,” in *The Routledge Hand-*

book of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building, ed. Chen Jian et al. (London: Routledge, 2018), 443-56.

[8]. Manijeh Nasrabadi, “‘Women Can Do Anything Men Can Do’: Gender and the Effects of Solidarity in the U.S. Iranian Student Movement, 1961-1979,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 42, nos. 3-4 (2014): 129.

[9]. See Negin Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse, and the Dilemma of Authenticity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, “The Origins of Communist Unity: Anti-Colonialism and Revolution in Iran’s Tri-Continental Movement,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 796-822.

[10]. See Arash Davari, “A Return to Which Self? Ali Shariati and Frantz Fanon on the Political Ethics of Insurrectionary Violence,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 34, no. 1 (2014): 86-105.

[11]. See Valentine M. Moghadam, “Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran,” *New Left Review* 166 (1987): 5-28; Haideh Moghisi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women’s Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Hammed Shahidian, “The Iranian Left and the ‘Woman Question’ in the Revolution of 1978-79,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (1994): 223-47.

[12]. On anti-imperialism, decolonization, and human rights see Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Steven L. B. Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization, and the Reconstruction of Global Values* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Bradley R. Simpson, “Self-Determination, Human

Rights, and the End of Empire in the 1970s,” *Humanity* 4, no. 2 (2013): 239-60.

[13]. Two important archives accessible outside of Iran with material on the Iranian opposition are the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, which holds the Parviz Shawkat and Hamid Shawkat collections amongst a number of collections on prerevolutionary Iran, and the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, which holds collections of documents and publications of a number of Iranian opposition groups, including the Confederation of Iranian Students. In addition, three major online Iranian oral history collections are available outside of Iran: the Harvard Iranian Oral History Collection; the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History Collection in Bethesda, Maryland; and the Research Association for Iranian Oral History in Berlin. See also Charles Kurzman, “Historiography of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement, 1977-79,” *Iranian Studies* 28, nos. 1-2 (1995): 25-38; Naghmeh Sahrabi, “The ‘Problem Space’ of the Historiography of the 1979 Iranian Revolution,” *History Compass* 16, no. 11 (2018): 1-10; and Cyrus Schayegh, “‘Seeing Like a State’: An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 1 (2010): 37-61.

[14]. For two recent examples see Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

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