

Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education During the Cold War. By Matthew K. Shannon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017. 256 pages.

In *Losing Hearts and Minds*, Matthew Shannon offers a new look at the little-explored topic of the Cold War-era Iranian student movement in the United States. He argues that the Iranian student movement served a dual-function for American-Iranian relations, one intended and the other not. International education was to serve as a means to entice Iran into the Western sphere in exchange for Western education and the route to economic modernization. The student exchange program, however, also allowed Iranian students a safe position from which to criticize Pahlavi Iran and forge alliances with progressive Americans against the Shah's regime. Through its attempts to balance its relationship with Iran against this unexpected student activism, the United States fatally undermined its image among Iranians at home and abroad, supporting the repressive and illiberal Pahlavi regime despite America's claim to sponsor liberty. *Losing Hearts and Minds* thus tells a cautionary tale, warning of the consequences of foreign policy angles that overemphasize utility at the expense of safety.

As Shannon notes, international education was a "soft power" alternative for spreading Western influence compared to manifestations of "hard power" such as war. Education, as soft power, was enticement into the Western sphere rather than compulsion, offering poorer unaligned countries economic and political modernization in exchange for Western alliances. In the case of Pahlavi Iran, however, the United States forewent liberal modernization. America offered education that would yield economic modernization, nuclear technology, and a new technocratic elite in exchange for Iranian solidarity against the Soviet Union. President John F. Kennedy

had concerns about the Shah's political repression, Shannon notes, but these concerns evaporated in later administrations' policies, in part because of a "good economics is good politics" stance that National Security Council staffer Robert Komer promoted and in part because of diplomatic expediency. Educating Iranian students to modernize undemocratic Iran's economy was acceptable if the Shah could keep communism out, a compromise characteristic of President Richard Nixon's later, formal support for strong man police states; the Nixon Doctrine.

Political repression at home did not disappear from Iranians' minds once they left Iran though, Shannon explains. On the contrary, figures such as Ali Fatemi and Sadeq Qotzbadeh quickly formed or took over diaspora student groups, most notably the Iranian Student Association (ISA), and used these as a vehicle to criticize Pahlavi Iran. The liberal and accepting atmosphere of the US was central to this, offering students relative safety from Pahlavi responses while allowing them to foster friendship with liberal Americans. The Iranian students and their liberal American allies subsequently began to hound the US for not criticizing Pahlavi brutality, questioning why American guarantees of liberalism and democracy went unfulfilled with respect to Iran. As much as the student movement gave the Shah his desired technocratic elite, it thus unintentionally created a very large international headache for the Pahlavi regime as well. A population of critics now existed which could more or less befriend anti-Pahlavi elements with impunity, which only worsened the Pahlavi position as ISA students reached out not just to liberals but to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as well. American attempts to handle this problem created another problem, though. Continued American support for the Shah's repression compromised America's reputation as a guarantor of freedom and democracy among the international student groups. The State and Justice Departments post-Kennedy cooperation with the Shah to deport students critical of the Pahlavi regime back to Iran for punishment further squandered the trust of Iranian students and their

liberal allies. That some of the ISA's liberal student allies were themselves funded by the CIA to frustrate Iranian student activism simply dug the hole deeper. American attempts to suppress the student movement undercut its Cold War claim to the high ground, as did the overbearing presence of American and American-trained officials in Iran proper which strengthened the notion of the Shah as a colonial pawn. Thus, American attempts to shape Iranian hearts and minds instead lost them.

Shannon's book is organized into several chapters after his summary introduction that tackle his narrative both chronologically and thematically. Chapters one and two summarize the conditions that led America to promote education efforts in Iran, invoking themes of defense and political concerns about human rights. Chapter two also connects to chapters three and four, sections which discuss the rise of student activists critical of the regime and whose central theme is political resistance, although the human rights theme sustains as well. Chapter five and the conclusion then assess the damage done to both the Iranian regime and American reputation, the titular “losing [of] hearts and minds”. The epilogue subsequently summarizes all of this.

Losing Hearts and Minds uses a diverse assortment of primary and secondary sources to develop Shannon's arguments. His secondary sources allow him to establish existing views within the literature as well as to explain concepts such as Joseph S. Nye's *Soft Power* (165). The primary sources, however, are where he shines. The documents that Shannon draws upon allow him to employ a variety of different history methodologies. As an example, his assessment of the student movement's foreign policy impact draws not just on straight diplomatic history but on intellectual history as well, using documents that trace the interactions between the United States National Student Association and the ISA to measure the ISA's ideological turns.

Similarly, his attention to the role that political history played in both Iran and the United States, including how the two major regime shifts – away from Mosaddeq and Kennedy towards the Shah and Johnson – directly shaped the course of the international education movement, show a steady attention to detail. So while Shannon's work is diplomatic history, it is also a cleverly diverse one.

Indeed, if Shannon's work has any issues, then the most this reviewer could say is that more on the absence of secular Iranian nationalist thought among the students would be welcome, assuming such evidence exists. The Shah's attempt to develop a new technocratic ruling class as a means to shut out more established factions in Iranian politics, however, may also be all the explanation necessary to understand nationalists' absence. The book is very convincing. *Losing Hearts and Minds* is an excellent work that certainly expands the field of knowledge available on the Cold War American-Iranian student exchange movement. It is easy to read and entertaining, making it useful not only for graduate seminars on Iranian history and American foreign policy but for undergraduate course introducing related topics.

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