

# H-Diplo ESSAY 234

## STATE OF THE FIELD>> UNITED STATES-IRANIAN RELATIONS

22 May 2020

<https://hdiplo.org/to/E234>

Editor: Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

REVIEW BY GREGORY BREW, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

---

This essay reviews the state of the field of United States-Iranian relations. Rather than attempt a comprehensive survey of this dynamic and expanding body of scholarship, this essay offers a glimpse of the field as it is currently evolving, proceeding chronologically according to topic rather than publications. The focus is on U.S.-Iranian relations, broadly defined, though for the sake of consistency diplomatic history is emphasized. Readers will note that works cited here focus predominantly on the international relationship, rather than the United States as an actor within Iran's modern history.<sup>1</sup> Key themes include the evolving importance of the Cold War, transnational ties, interpretations of the Islamic Revolution from the perspective of U.S. policy-makers, and the continued preoccupation with U.S.-Iranian confrontations in the post-revolutionary period.

### *The Cold War and Iran*

Early encounters between the United States and Iran came chiefly through the work of missionaries, oil companies, and local diplomats.<sup>2</sup> A number of diplomatic disputes between Iran and the United States in the 1920s, including the death of American consul Robert Imbrie in 1924, and an abortive effort by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey to secure an oil concession, marked an era of limited engagement.<sup>3</sup>

World War II brought about a more concrete American involvement in the country's politics. Worried that the Anglo-Soviet occupation would weaken Iran's internal stability, the U.S. provided Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's government with advisory missions, while U.S. oil companies attempted yet again to secure an oil concession in 1944.<sup>4</sup> The crucial moment came in March 1946, when a Soviet refusal to withdraw from Azerbaijan prompted the Cold War's first crisis. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Surveys of modern Iranian history include Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) and Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: the Pahlavis and After*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Michael P. Zirinsky, "A Panacea for the Ills of the Country: American Presbyterian Education in Inter-War Iran," *Iranian Studies* 26:1/2 (Winter-Spring, 1993): 119-137.

<sup>3</sup> Zirinsky, "Blood, Power, and Hypocrisy: The Murder of Robert Imbrie and American Relations with Pahlavi Iran, 1924," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18:3 (1986): 275-292; Michael A. Rubin, "Stumbling Through the 'Open Door': The U.S. in Persia and the Standard-Sinclair Oil Dispute, 1920-1925," *Iranian Studies* 28:3-4 (Summer/Fall 1995): 203-229. See also John Ghazvinian, *America and Iran: The Long and Winding Road, from 1720 to the Present* (Penguin Random House, August 2020).

<sup>4</sup> T.H. Vail Motter, *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1952); Simon Davis, *Contested Space: Anglo-American Relations in the Persian Gulf, 1939-1947* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009).

Azerbaijan Crisis crystallized U.S. policy towards Iran. Subsequent strategy focused on maintaining the country's pro-Western strategic alignment and preventing the spread of Soviet influence.<sup>5</sup>

In 2000, Matthew Connelly urged historians to “take off the Cold War lens,” and broaden their understanding of international history past the bipolar competition of Moscow and Washington.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Odd Arne Westad's push to bring the Cold War into the Global South has encouraged scholars to complicate the decades-old view of the conflict's Euro-centric nature.<sup>7</sup> Scholarship around the U.S. relationship with Iran has grappled with these challenges. Older work based on research conducted in the 1980s continues to influence the discourse around U.S.-Iranian relations in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> New surveys of the Cold War period prioritize strategic considerations, following in the footsteps of these older works while adding new sources to complement the dominant narratives around the origins and development of the U.S. alliance with Pahlavi Iran.<sup>9</sup>

Considerable work has been done to broaden the relationship past the Oval Office and Foggy Bottom, with historians utilizing new sources and methodologies, including the archives of non-state actors, philanthropic foundations, and private corporations. Matthew Shannon focuses on education as an important link between the U.S. and Iran, with young Iranians forming student groups and influencing the course of bilateral relations while protesting the Shah's government from abroad.<sup>10</sup> Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-state actors, which have enjoyed their own renaissance within the Cold War historiography following Nick Cullather's call to reconceptualize “development as history,” have gained new significance.<sup>11</sup> Groups affiliated with the United States played an important role in shaping the Pahlavi domestic

---

<sup>5</sup> Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mark H. Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-1953* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987); Stephen L. McFarland, “A Peripheral View of the Origins of the Cold War: the Crises in Iran, 1941-47,” *Diplomatic History* 4:4 (1980): 333-351; and Bruce Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Diplomacy and Conflict in Iran, Turkey and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). For a newer look at the Azerbaijan Crisis, see Louise Fawcett, “Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?” *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014): 379-399.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict During the Algerian War for Independence,” *The American Historical Review* 105:3 (2000): 739-769.

<sup>7</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Richard Cottam *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran, 1946-51: the Diplomacy of Neglect* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Goode, *The United States and Iran: in the Shadow of Mosaddeq* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); and Rouhollah Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975). Of additional interest is Barry M. Rubin's, *Paved with Good Intentions: the American Experience and Iran* (New York: Penguin, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> David Collier, *Democracy and the Nature of American Influence in Iran, 1941-1979* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017); Ben Offler, *US Foreign Policy and the Modernization of Iran: Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and the Shah* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew K. Shannon, *Losing Hearts and Minds: American-Iranian Relations and International Education During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017). See also Shannon, “Reading Iran: American Academics and the Last Shah,” *Iranian Studies* 51:2 (2018): 289-316.

<sup>11</sup> Nick Cullather, “Development? It's History,” *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (2000): 641-653.

development program, while forming subtle links between the capitals of the West and the Shah's government in Tehran.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. development mission, which began as technical assistance through the Point Four program in the 1950s and later spawned the Peace Corps and the US Agency for International Development (AID) in the 1960s and 1970s, has enjoyed new attention, as have other international development organizations such as the World Bank and Ford Foundation.<sup>13</sup> Taking advantage of the cultural turn in international history, scholars have deployed analysis of gendered language and romanticism in U.S. policy-making, paying particular attention to how Americans "psychologized" Iran and Iranians.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the Cold War lens has proven a difficult prescription to shake off. The 1953 coup d'état, a turning point in U.S.-Iranian relations, is traditionally viewed in the context of American anxieties over the spread of Communism.<sup>15</sup> In 2017, a retrospective volume in the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series provided over 300 new documents regarding the U.S. decision to overthrow Iran's nationalist Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in August 1953, as well details of Operation TPAJAX itself. Though it provided few revelations, the new volume suggests the coup was not meant to prevent an imminent Communist takeover in Iran.<sup>16</sup> A small body of revisionist scholars claim that the CIA played a minor role in the overthrow of Mossadegh, choosing instead to emphasize the role of Shi'a clerics.<sup>17</sup> This reinterpretation has sparked a sharp rebuke from established scholars, who have pointed to the revisionists' lack of solid evidence.<sup>18</sup> Rather than exonerate

---

<sup>12</sup> Christopher T. Fisher, "Moral Purpose is the Important Thing:' David Lilienthal, Iran and the Meaning of Development in the US, 1956-63," *The International History Review* 33:3 (2011): 431-451; Gregory Brew, "'What They Need is Management:' American NGOs, the Second Seven Year Plan and Economic Development in Iran, 1954-1963," *International History Review* (Online, December 2017): 1-22.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Garlitz, *A Mission for Development: Utah Universities and the Point Four Program in Iran* (University Press of Colorado, 2018); Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, "The New Frontier Meets the White Revolution: the Peace Corps in Iran, 1962-76," *Iranian Studies* 51:4 (2018): 587-612; Jacob Shively, 'Good Deeds Aren't Enough:' Point Four in Iran, 1949-1953," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 29:3 (2018): 413-431; Amy L.S. Staples, "Seeing Diplomacy Through Banker's Eyes: The World Bank, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, and the Aswan High Dam," *Diplomatic History* 26:3 (Summer 2002): 397-418; and Victor V. Nemchenok, "'That So Fair a Thing Should Be So Frail': The Ford Foundation and the Failure of Rural Development in Iran, 1953-1964," *Middle East Journal* 63:2 (Spring 2009): 261-284.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Warne, "Psychoanalyzing Iran: Kennedy's Iran Task Force and the Modernization of Orientalism, 1961-3," *The International History Review* 35:2 (2013): 396-422; on 1960s, see Hugh Wilford, "'Essentially a Work of Fiction:' Kermit 'Kim' Roosevelt, Imperial Romance, and the Iran Coup of 1953," *Diplomatic History* 40:5 (2016): 922-947, and Offiler, "'Marriage,' 'Massage,' Metaphor and Gender in US-Iranian Relations During the 1960s," *International History Review* 42:1 (Jan 2020): 117-132.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: the United States, Great Britain and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil: Crisis in Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); W. Roger Louis and Bill, eds., *Mosaddeq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil* (London: Tauris, 1988); Malcolm Byrne and Mark J. Gasiorowski, eds., *Mohammed Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); and Frank J. Gavin, "Politics, Power, and US Policy in Iran, 1950-1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1:1 (Winter 1999): 56-89.

<sup>16</sup> Brew, "The Collapse Narrative: the United States, Mohammed Mossadegh, and the Coup Decision of 1953," *Texas National Security Review* 2:4 (Nov. 2019): 38-59. See also Gasiorowski, "U.S. Perceptions of the Communist Threat in Iran During the Mossadegh Era," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 21:3 (Summer 2019): 1-37.

<sup>17</sup> Darioush Bayandor, *Iran and the CIA: the Fall of Mosaddeq Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Ray Takeyh and Steven Simon, *The Pragmatic Superpower: Winning the Cold War in the Middle East* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 53-89; and Takeyh, "What Really Happened in Iran: The CIA, the Ouster of Mosaddeq, and the Restoration of the Shah," *Foreign Affairs* 93:4 (July/August 2014): 2-14, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-06-16/what-really-happened-iran>.

<sup>18</sup> Fakhreddin Azimi, "The Overthrow of the Government of Mosaddeq Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 45:5 (2012): 693-712.

the United States, new documents largely confirm what historians have long asserted: U.S. agents worked with the Shah and domestic Iranian groups to overthrow Mossadegh, replacing his government with one more friendly to the West.

From 1953 to 1979, the Cold War shaped the official U.S. engagement with Iran. In the early 1960s, officials within the Kennedy Administration became convinced the Shah's rule would not last without necessary reforms. A range of recent scholarship has examined this episode, emphasizing the U.S. concern with Iranian stability and the Orientalist assumptions of Iranian political maturity.<sup>19</sup> However, interpretations have largely stuck to James Goode's original thesis, where U.S. support for the Shah revived once the White Revolution reform campaign got underway in early 1963.<sup>20</sup> While the Shah's government continued to rely on U.S. support, depictions of the Pahlavi monarch as an "American stooge" have yielded to a growing body of scholarship emphasizing the Shah's desire for an independent foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> This trend culminated in the Shah's ascendance during the Nixon Administration, when Iran became a U.S. proxy in the Persian Gulf and a crucial element in the "twin pillars" component of the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>22</sup>

While interpretations of the U.S. Cold War relationship with Iran take older scholarship at their starting point, the most exciting new work has been in the emerging field of Soviet-Iranian relations. The partial opening of Soviet archives has allowed scholars to explore the Soviet side of the Azerbaijan Crisis, as well as Stalin's view of Mosaddegh and the National Front.<sup>23</sup> The Shah's diplomacy with Moscow in the 1950s and 1960s aimed at a de-escalation of tensions, even as the Shah deepened his relationship with the United States through arms purchases.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, his foreign policy triumphs—a successful intervention in Oman, a de-escalation with Ba'athist Iraq, a policy of production and revenue maximizing within OPEC—were not enough to save his regime from collapse.

### *The Revolution and Its Aftermath*

The Islamic Revolution of 1978-1980, together with the hostage crisis of November 1979-January 1981, looms large over the field of U.S.-Iranian relations, casting a shadow both forward and back. In his popular account of the 1953 coup,

---

<sup>19</sup> Nemchenok, "In Search of Stability Amid Chaos: US Policy Toward Iran 1961-63," *Cold War History* 10 (2010): 341-369; Roland Popp, "Benign Intervention? The Kennedy Administration's Push for Reform in Iran," in Manfred Berg and Andreas Etges, eds., *John F. Kennedy and the 'Thousand Days': New Perspectives on the Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kennedy Administration* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg, 2007), 197-219, and April R. Summitt, "For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran," *The Middle East Journal* 58:4 (Autumn 2000): 560-575.

<sup>20</sup> James F. Goode, "Reforming Iran during the Kennedy Years," *Diplomatic History* 15 (Winter 1991): 13-29

<sup>21</sup> Andrew L. Johns, "The Johnson Administration, the Shah of Iran, and the Changing Pattern of U.S.-Iranian Relations, 1965-1967: 'Tired of Being Treated like a Schoolboy,'" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9:2 (Spring 2007): 64-94, and Claudia Castiglioni, "No Longer a Client, Not Yet a Partner: the US-Iranian Alliance in the Johnson Years," *Cold War History* 15:4 (Oct., 2015): 491-509.

<sup>22</sup> Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger and the Shah: the United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Natalia Egorova, "Stalin's Oil Policy and the Iranian Crisis of 1945-1946," *Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas*, ed. Jeronim Perovic (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 79-104; Vladislav M. Zubok, "Stalin, Soviet Intelligence, and the Struggle for Iran, 1945-53," *Diplomatic History* 44:1 (January 2020): 22-46; Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "The Soviet Union and Mosaddeq: A Research Note," *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014): 401-418.

<sup>24</sup> Alvandi, "The Shah's Détente with Khrushchev: Iran's 1962 Missile Base Pledge to the Soviet Union," *Cold War History* 14:3 (2014): 423-444, and Alvandi, "Flirting with Neutrality: The Shah, Khrushchev, and the Failed 1959 Soviet-Iranian Negotiations," *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014): 419-440; on arms sales, see Stephen J. McGlinchey, *US Arms Policies Towards the Shah's Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

journalist Stephen Kinzer makes explicit the connection between the fall of Mossadegh and the rise of an Islamic, anti-U.S. regime twenty-five years later.<sup>25</sup> Popular accounts of the episode draw links between the events of 1979-1980, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the U.S. Global War on Terror.<sup>26</sup> Scholars have made similar connections, pointing to the revolution as a transformative moment for the United States in the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> The drama of the hostage crisis, retold through a popular Academy Award-winning 2013 film, continues to elicit interest and reflection forty-years later.<sup>28</sup>

The basic contours of the U.S. reaction to Iran's revolution have been known for some time.<sup>29</sup> Yet declassification of documents from the Ford, Carter and Reagan periods has allowed for a more detailed analysis of the crisis. New accounts emphasize the American understanding (or lack thereof) of Shi'a Islam, while re-contextualizing Carter's support for human rights as a factor in the Shah's sudden fall from power. According to Luca Trenta, Carter's rhetoric on human rights startled the Shah, who took it as a form of pressure reminiscent of the Kennedy challenge. Yet Carter quickly backtracked, re-asserting U.S. support for the Shah while refusing to form a dialogue with Iran's emerging opposition groups.<sup>30</sup> Christian Emery's recent book paints a picture of the Carter Administration as divided, reactive, and ignorant of conditions within Iran in the aftermath of the Shah's January 1979 departure.<sup>31</sup> While Iran's revolutionaries—drawing, in part, on the legacy of 1953—had a consistent view of the United States as an interventionist, imperialist hegemon, “the American perspective was very different: principally because it lacked one,” writes Emery.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Mattin Biglari explores how U.S. policy-makers grappled with the symbols and traditions of Shi'a Islam, drawing on Carter's own religious beliefs to explain why the U.S. saw Khomeini as uniquely unfit to act as Iran's new leader.<sup>33</sup> Emery and Pedram Maghsoud-Nia both contend that

---

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: the First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Press Monthly, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran* (Westport: Praeger, 2000); David Harris, *The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004); and David Farber, *Taken Hostage: the Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter With Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> *Argo* (Dir. Ben Affleck, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 216-260. See also Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985) and Russell L. Moses, *Freeing the Hostages: Reexamining U.S.-Iranian Negotiations and Soviet Policy, 1979-1981* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Luca Trenta, “The Champion of Human Rights Meets the King of Kings: Jimmy Carter, the Shah, and Iranian Illusions and Rage,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24:4 (2013): 476-498.

<sup>31</sup> Christian Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution: the Cold War Dynamics of Engagement and Strategic Alliance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Mattin Biglari, “‘Captive to the Demonology of the Iranian Mobs:’ U.S. Foreign Policy and Perceptions of Shi'a Islam during the Iranian Revolution, 1978-79,” *Diplomatic History* 40:4 (2016): 579-605.

Cold War concerns continued to dominate American thinking. Until the hostage crisis shattered the fragile state of U.S.-Iranian relations, Carter hoped to use the new Islamist state as a barrier to Soviet influence in the Middle East.<sup>34</sup>

Any kind of rapprochement appeared impossible after the trauma of the hostage crisis. The United States and Iran spent the 1980s conducting a “twilight war,” which played out largely behind the scenes.<sup>35</sup> Yet there continued to be compelling strategic reasons—again related to the Cold War—for a new understanding with Tehran. Fumbling efforts to reach out to the Islamic Republic, which was then engaged in a fierce war with neighboring Iraq, resulted in the Iran-Contra Affair. Thanks to the efforts of the National Security Archive, the first comprehensive account of Iran-Contra now exists.<sup>36</sup> First-hand accounts by policy-makers, think-tank analysts, and international relations’ experts emphasize the enduring nature of the conflict between Washington and Tehran after 1979.<sup>37</sup> Still, declassification has revealed consistent attempts by American administrations to find some *modus vivendi* with Tehran.<sup>38</sup> A years-long diplomatic effort by the international community to reign in Iran’s nuclear program ended in success in July 2015, with Tehran agreeing to a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which exchanged economic relief for restrictions on enrichment, among other conditions. The agreement was the most substantial diplomatic achievement of the Barack Obama era, one that participants celebrated as a potential turning point in U.S.-Iranian relation.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the success was short-lived, as the Trump Administration withdrew from the agreement and re-imposed sanctions on Iran in 2018. After the U.S. withdrawal and the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, tensions steadily escalated. In 2019, Iran launched attacks on oil tankers, shot down a U.S. drone, and orchestrated an assault on the Saudi oil facility in Abqaiq. A crisis occurred over the U.S. assassination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in January 2020. Soleimani’s death threatened to further escalate the conflict brewing between Tehran and Washington, though both sides took steps to reduce tensions. These episodes mark the continued state of antagonism characterizing U.S.-Iranian relations.

### *Conclusion*

---

<sup>34</sup> Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution*, 4; Pedram Maghsoud-Nia, “The Rise of the Iranian Leviathan: US-Iranian Relations and the Evolution of the Postrevolutionary State,” in Osamah F. Khalil, ed., *United States Relations with China and Iran: Toward the Asian Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019): 171-186.

<sup>35</sup> David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan’s Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> This literature is voluminous. A sample includes Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007); Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: the Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004); Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: the Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); and John W. Limbert, *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> The National Security Archive published a collection of 14,000 pages covering U.S.-Iranian relations from 1978 to 2015 in December 2019. See *Digital National Security Archive (DNSA): U.S. Policy Toward Iran: From the Revolution to the Nuclear Accord, 1978-2015*, [https://proquest.libguides.com/dnsa/dnsa\\_54](https://proquest.libguides.com/dnsa/dnsa_54).

<sup>39</sup> Trita Parsi, *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), and *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama’s Diplomacy with Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Deeply felt sentiments perpetuate the conflict currently dividing Iran and the United States. For Iran, it is the legacy of 1953, the U.S. role in supporting the Shah's authoritarianism, and the political culture of the Islamic Republic, where hardliners use the threat of the 'Great Satan' to galvanize public support while stoking anti-Western sentiment to maintain their hold on power. For the United States, it is the lingering bitterness left by the hostage crisis, exacerbated by Iranian ambitions towards regional pre-eminence and the growing antipathy of U.S. allies who see the powerful Islamic regime in Tehran as a direct threat to their own security. Iran's attacks on U.S. forces throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as well as its support for proxy groups that have worked to counter U.S. influence, have encouraged Washington to view Iran as a major regional threat. In the U.S. Iran is typically portrayed as a country radicalized by religion, where clerics lead obedient mobs in chants of 'Death to America' and chador-clad women march in a seemingly endless procession past the same murals painted across the walls of the former U.S. embassy. In Iran, the United States is still characterized as an existential threat, an arrogant superpower that seeks to restrict Iranian freedom while violating its sovereignty. Though diplomatic records provide a window into questions of policy, there remain many questions surrounding the emotional charge affecting the ties binding Tehran and Washington into mutual suspicion and ongoing hostility. Even after forty years of bitterness, it is unclear when, or if, the underlying conflict at the heart of U.S.-Iranian relations will ever be resolved.

**Gregory Brew** is a historian of U.S.-Iranian relations, international oil, and the Cold War. He received his Ph.D. from Georgetown University in 2018 and is a 2018-2020 post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. His work has appeared in *Iranian Studies*, *International History Review* and *Texas National Security Review*.