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**The United States and the “Loss” of Iran**

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Thirty years after the Islamic revolution of 1979, the relationship between the United States and Iran remains problematic and the future prospects unknown. The potential threat to the regional and global balance of power caused by Iranian nuclear ambitions is often at the center of international debates. However, when seeking to shape future policies towards Iran, it is important to recall that before the collapse of the Shah’s regime, the United States (and, to a large degree, the “West” as a whole) had for decades relied on this country to guarantee the “friendly” orientation of this strategically vital region.

In exploring both the motivations of the earlier alliance and the roots of the present day impasse, this paper analyzes the crucial, albeit at times difficult, relationship between Washington and the Shah of Iran. From the early 1950s to the late 1970s, Tehran’s fundamental contribution to America’s policy of global containment of the Soviet Union emerges as the central element of U.S. policy. Despite the mismanagement of Iranian internal affairs and the domestic problems which persisted throughout the decades, the American leaders constantly sought to secure a tight and positive relationship with the Shah. The events leading to the 1979 revolution and Washington’s countermeasures are assessed within this context, pointing to America’s erroneous perceptions and misjudgments of the local reality which resulted from a still rigidly Soviet-centric worldview. Finally, the paper tries to tackle with the difficult question of what, if any, are the lessons and implications of this complex history for the future of U.S.-Iranian relations.