

W3961 US-Iran Relations

Fridays 12-2:00 pm, International Affairs Building 501

Dr Andrew Scott Cooper

With the conclusion of last year's nuclear agreement, relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran have entered an uncertain new era with the potential for greatly enhanced cooperation but also conflict. In this senior seminar, students will explore the broad trajectory of a bilateral relationship that in the past seventy years has taken two one-time allies to the brink of war and back. The focus of study will be on how respective leaders and their officials shaped foreign policy decision-making. For example, what were the reasons that motivated President Dwight Eisenhower to approve a covert plan to overthrow the Iranian government in 1953? Alternately, why did Iran's king, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, embark on a defense buildup to dominate the Persian Gulf in the seventies? How did arms sales, oil prices, commerce and nuclear technology impact bilateral relations?

With the help of US Government declassified documents, translated Iranian works, and the latest revisionist scholarship, students can assess for themselves how and why leaders on both sides made the decisions that eventually led to today's uneasy relationship. They will learn the extent to which foreign policy decision-making is shaped by variables including the personalities of the leaders, bureaucratic infighting, national interest, domestic politics, economics, religion and culture. Studying the past helps foster "historical awareness," the awareness that events do not occur in isolation and that decisions are not made in a vacuum. This is particularly relevant with the study of US-Iran relations: the Shah's ejection in 1979 plunged the Persian Gulf and indeed much of southwest Asia into a downward spiral of unrest, crisis and collapse. More research is needed to try and understand how and why American efforts to prevent instability in Iran during the Cold War may have actually contributed to regime collapse.

Each class will focus on a specific 'turning point' episode or crisis i.e. President Truman's decision in the late forties to support Iran against the Soviet Union. Students will have the opportunity to examine primary source archival documents, comparing and contrasting these with more traditional scholarly interpretations. Under the Instructor's guidance, by the end of semester students will have produced a research paper (8-10,000 words) on a topic related to one of the 'turning point' episodes covered in class. Because the paper constitutes the sole grade, before they apply for a seat in class students should feel confident about tackling a lengthy investigative research and writing project. Students in the past have run into trouble by not spending the requisite time planning their paper and searching for source documentation; this is *not* a project that can be left to the last minute. Sample research topics might include the repercussions of President Jimmy Carter's human rights policy on Iran in the late seventies; the impact of the Shah's decision to acquire nuclear technology; and the strategic rationale behind the US decision to support Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War.

To ensure they stay on top of their work, students *must* settle on a research paper topic by Friday, October 7. Toward the end of the semester, students will also deliver a short PowerPoint

presentation on their research topic and findings. The last day of class is Friday, December 9, and the final day to hand in research papers is the following Monday, December 12 by 5:00pm.

Required Reading List

Alam, Asadollah, Introduced and Edited by Alinaghi Alikhani, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-77*. St. Martin's Press: New York 1991.

Blight, James G., *Becoming Enemies: US-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War 1979-88*. Roman and Littlefield 2014.

Cooper, Andrew Scott, *The Fall of Heaven: The Pahlavis and the Final Days of Imperial Iran* (Henry Holt and Company: New York 2016).

Cooper, Andrew Scott, *The Oil Kings: How the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (Simon & Schuster: New York 2011).

May, Ernest R., and Neustadt, Richard, *Thinking in Time: The Use of History for Decision-Makers* (Free Press 1988).

Mints, Alex and DeRouen, Karl, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making*. Cambridge University Press. February 22, 2010.

Sick, Gary. *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran*. Random House: New York 1985.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE: Friday, September 9

Introduction

WEEK TWO: Friday, September 16

1945-51: Birth of an Alliance

1. Gasiorowski, Mark J., and Byrne, Malcolm. *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. Chapter 6 (posted).
2. Saikal, Amin. *The Rise and Fall of the Shah*. Princeton University Press: Princeton 1980. Chapter 1 (posted).
3. 3. Telegram From the Consul at Tabriz (Sutton) to the Secretary of State, December 12, 1946 (received December 16—1:14 PM). <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v07/d425>

4. Interview between the President and the Shah of Iran, November 18, 1949:
http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/achesonmemos/view.php?documentid=66-2_27&documentYear=1949&documentVersion=both

5. Memorandum of Conversation with the Shah of Iran and the Ambassador of Iran, November 18, 1949. Acheson Papers - Secretary of State File.
http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/achesonmemos/view.php?documentVersion=both&documentid=66-2_28&documentYear=1949&pagenumber=1

WEEK THREE: Friday, September 30
1951-53: Oil Nationalization and Covert Operations

WEEK FOUR: Friday, October 7
1961-63: Kennedy's Experiment With Reform

WEEK FIVE: Friday, October 14
1969-72: Nixon's Guardian of the Gulf

WEEK SIX: Friday, October 21
1973-75: The Shah Breaks Away

WEEK SEVEN: Friday, October 28
1976-77: Carter and Human Rights

WEEK EIGHT: Friday, November 4
1978-79: Fall of the Shah

WEEK NINE: Friday, November 11
1980-88: Iran-Iraq War and Iran-Contra

WEEK TEN: Friday, November 18
1989-2015: The Long Freeze

WEEK ELEVEN: Friday, November 25
Thanksgiving Holiday

WEEK TWELVE: Friday, December 2
Classroom Presentations

WEEK THIRTEEN: Friday, December 9
Classroom Presentations