



Strategic Alignments Under Fire: Iran's Pahlavi-Era Alliances and the Balance of Threat Framework

Kerem TÜRK*

Öz

This study investigates Iran's alliance strategies during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979) through the analytical framework of Stephen M. Walt's Balance of Threat Theory. The theory posits that states form alliances not merely in response to the distribution of power, but rather as a reaction to perceived threats—shaped by factors such as aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions. The core research question addressed here is: How can Pahlavi Iran's alliance choices be explained through the intersection of external and internal threat perceptions? Within this framework, the study explores how Iran's foreign policy behavior was influenced by both external threats—including Soviet expansionism, pan-Arabism, and revolutionary regimes in the region—and internal threats, such as the Tudeh Party, the Mossadegh administration, and economic vulnerability. The research is based on historical records, secondary literature, and policy documents, and systematically links empirical evidence with the theoretical framework. The strategic alliance with the United States was motivated not only by the perceived threat from the Soviet Union but also by the imperative to secure the regime against domestic opposition. Likewise, Iran's clandestine cooperation with Israel functioned as a counterbalancing strategy against radical regimes such as Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. In addition, regional alignments with conservative monarchies like Saudi Arabia and Jordan constituted complementary elements of Iran's broader security architecture. During the 1960s, Iran's pursuit of close ties with the United States alongside limited détente and arms deals with the USSR exemplifies a strategy of “hedging,” which is analyzed as part of the study's conceptual framework. The findings suggest that Iran's foreign policy during the Pahlavi period was predominantly shaped by threat perception, and that the explanatory power of Walt's Balance of Threat Theory significantly increases when combined with the regime-security-oriented concept of omnibalancing and the notion of hedging.

Keywords: Balance of Threat Theory, Pahlavi Era, Iran–United States Alliance, Iran–Israel Relations, Omnibalancing&Hedging.

* PhD Student, Shahid Beheshti University-IR, krmturk@gmail.com, Tehran, İran.
ORCID: 0000-0002-8296-9098



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İran Çalışmaları Dergisi bilginin yayılması ve zenginleşmesi için Açık Erişim Politikasına uymaktadır.



Ateş Altındaki Stratejik Uyumlar: Pehlevî Dönemi İran İttifakları ve Tehdit Dengesi Çerçevesi

Kerem TÜRK*

Öz

Bu çalışma, İran'ın 1925-1979 yılları arasındaki Pehlevî döneminde benimsediği ittifak politikalarını, Stephen M. Walt tarafından geliştirilen Tehdit Dengesi Teorisi çerçevesinde analiz etmektedir. Teori, devletlerin ittifak ilişkilerini yalnızca güç dağılımına değil, aynı zamanda algılanan tehdit unsurlarına — toplam kapasite, coğrafi yakınlık, saldırı kabiliyeti ve niyetler — göre şekillendirdiğini savunur. Çalışmanın temel araştırma sorusu, “Pehlevî dönemi İran'ın ittifak tercihleri, dış ve iç tehdit algılarının kesişimi bağlamında nasıl açıklanabilir?” şeklinde formüle edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, İran'ın dış politika yönelimlerinin hem dışsal (Sovyet yayılcılığı, pan-Arabizm, bölgesel devrimci rejimler) hem de içsel (Tudeh Partisi, Musaddık yönetimi, ekonomik kırılganlık) tehdit algılarıyla nasıl biçimlendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, tarihsel belgeler, ikincil literatür ve dönemin politika belgelerinden yararlanılarak yapılmış, kuramsal çerçeve ile ampirik veriler sistematik biçimde ilişkilendirilmiştir. İran'ın ABD ile kurduğu stratejik ittifak, yalnızca Sovyet tehdidine karşı değil, rejimin iç güvenliğini sağlama amacıyla da değerlendirilmiştir. Benzer şekilde, İsrail ile geliştirilen örtülü iş birliği, Mısır, Irak ve Suriye gibi radikal rejimlere karşı denge arayışının bir parçası olmuştur. Ayrıca, Suudi Arabistan ve Ürdün gibi muhafazakâr monarşilerle yürütülen bölgesel iş birlikleri, İran'ın güvenlik stratejisinin tamamlayıcı unsurlarıdır. 1960'larda ise İran'ın bir yandan ABD ile yakın ittifakını sürdürürken diğer yandan SSCB ile sınırlı silah anlaşmaları ve diplomatik açılımlar gerçekleştirmesi, literatürde hedging olarak tanımlanan stratejinin bir örneği olarak incelenmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, Pehlevî dönemi İran dış politikasının tehdit algılarına dayalı olarak şekillendiğini ve Walt'un Tehdit Dengesi Teorisi'nin, rejim güvenliği odaklı omnibalancing yaklaşımı ve hedging kavramı ile birlikte ele alındığında bu süreçleri açıklamada daha güçlü bir kuramsal çerçeve sunduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tehdit Dengesi Teorisi, Pehlevî Dönemi, İran-ABD İttifakı, İran-İsrail İlişkileri, Omnibalancing&Hedging.

* Doktora Öğrencisi, Shahid Beheshti Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, krmturk@gmail.com, Tahran, İran. ORCID: 0000-0002-8296-9098

1. Introduction

Iran experienced two major transformations in the domains of society, politics, and international relations over the course of the 20th century.¹ The first took place when Reza Khan toppled the Qajar Dynasty—then in one of the weakest phases of its rule—and established the Pahlavi monarchy in its stead. The primary cause of the Qajars' weakness lay in their decentralized and non-institutionalized state structure (Abrahamian, 2009, p. 12; Garthwaite, 2005, p. 13; Şen, 2016, p. 69). Under Reza Shah, a modern state apparatus was constructed through the consolidation of centralized authority, the establishment of state institutions, the development of a professional military, and the implementation of a structured tax system (Banani, 1961, p. 87).

Amidst this process of state-building, and with the onset of the Cold War, Iran sought to counterbalance the Soviet threat from the north by aligning itself with the Western bloc, culminating in a formal and extensive alliance with the United States. The strategic rationale behind this alignment rested on the belief that a non-Arab, pro-Western state in the Middle East would bolster Iran's security vis-à-vis its traditional Arab adversaries—particularly in light of the threats posed by Nasserist pan-Arabism and Soviet communism. As part of this strategy, Iran also entered into a covert alliance with Israel, encompassing military, economic, and intelligence cooperation—an arrangement often described in the literature as an “unofficial marriage” (Kaye et al., 2011, p. 9; Menashri, 2006, p. 108; Miglietta, 2002, p. 58; Parsi, 2007a, pp. 19–20).

The second major transformation came with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which dramatically altered the new regime's threat perceptions; both the United States and Israel were reclassified as enemies (Ramazani, 2013, p. 83). This rupture highlights how shifting perceptions of threat fundamentally shaped alliance behavior across the century.

¹ While the analysis primarily centers on two major transformations, it is important to acknowledge that the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1907 (*Enghelab-e Mashrutiyat*) holds comparable historical significance to both the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Revolution. This pivotal event, which resulted in the creation of a parliament during the Qajar era, marked the beginning of a profound transformation that ushered Iran into the modern era (Abrahamian, 1983, pp. 69–81). Nevertheless, given that this study focuses on shifts directly influencing Iran's alliance behavior, the emphasis is placed on the two transformative periods between 1925 and 1979, rather than on the Constitutional Revolution.

This article explores the formation and evolution of Iran's alliance behavior during the Pahlavi era, specifically focusing on the period from 1925 to 1979, prior to the Islamic Revolution. The study combines theoretical and historical analysis: it draws upon primary sources, secondary literature, and policy documents, and employs Stephen M. Walt's Balance of Threat Theory as the main conceptual framework to interpret the empirical evidence. While Walt's theory emphasizes external threats, the study also incorporates insights from Steven R. David's *omnibalancing* approach to account for the regime-security dimension and internal vulnerabilities. Moreover, the article considers the concept of *hedging* to explain Iran's dual strategy in the 1960s, when Tehran maintained close ties with Washington while simultaneously seeking limited *détente* with Moscow.

The article therefore asks *how Pahlavi Iran's alliance choices can be explained through the intersection of external threats and regime-security-related internal challenges*. The analysis begins by outlining the Balance of Threat Theory as the study's conceptual foundation and by situating it alongside *omnibalancing* and *hedging* perspectives. It then investigates the Iran–U.S. alliance, which emerged in response to the escalating Soviet threat to Iran. As the Soviet threat diminished in the 1960s, subsequent sections examine the growing regional threats posed by Egypt under Nasser's leadership, as well as by Syria and post-1958 Iraq—states that sought to isolate Iran within the regional system. In this context, the article also provides a detailed account of Iran's regional alignments with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. The study ultimately contends that Iran's alliance behavior from the inception of the Pahlavi dynasty to the 1979 Revolution was shaped by overlapping external and internal threats, and that the Balance of Threat Theory, when combined with the concepts of *omnibalancing* and *hedging*, offers a more comprehensive theoretical lens for understanding the rationale behind alliance formation during this period.

In methodological terms, this study employs a qualitative, theory-guided process-tracing design to link external shocks and domestic vulnerabilities to Iran's alliance choices during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979). The evidence base combines (i) primary materials (e.g., Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers volumes, treaties, official statements), (ii) secondary historical works, and (iii) contemporary policy analyses

cited throughout the article. Event selection follows two criteria: salience (episodes that materially altered Iran's security environment—such as the 1945–46 Azerbaijan crisis, the 1953 coup, the 1958 Iraqi revolution, and the 1967 war) and traceability (availability of sources to reconstruct the sequence from threat perception to strategic response and alliance configuration). Variables from Walt's Balance of Threat (aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, intentions) guided the coding of perceived external threats; regime-security indicators (elite cohesion, organized opposition, coup risk) informed the *omnibalancing* dimension; and *hedging* was operationalized as the simultaneous pursuit of tight alignment with the United States and limited *détente*/arms deals with the USSR without abandoning core commitments. The aim is not exhaustive narrative history but a transparent mapping between historical evidence and analytical claims (Walt, 1988; David, 1991; Johns, 2007; Alvandi, 2014a, 2014b; Kimball, 2006).

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Balance of Threat

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has long been shaped by various theoretical frameworks that seek to explain the rationale behind alliance formation among states. Among these, the concept of the balance of threat has emerged as a particularly influential analytical tool. Originally conceived as an extension of balance of power theory, it offers a more refined understanding of why states choose to align with certain powers over others. The traditional balance of power theory posits that national security is best preserved when military capabilities are distributed in such a way that no single state is able to dominate others. Rooted in realist thought, this perspective holds that states enter into alliances to counter stronger adversaries, preserve stability, and prevent the rise of hegemonic powers (Morgenthau, 1973; Piccoli, 1999, p. 1).

However, the advent of the Cold War fundamentally altered the dynamics of alliance politics, necessitating more sophisticated theoretical approaches. The emergence of a bipolar international order—defined by the strategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union—introduced new variables into alliance behavior. During this period, alliances were shaped not solely by military considerations but also by ideological alignment,

economic interests, and strategic calculations. As a result, a range of theories emerged in response to the growing complexity of the international system (Türk, 2020, pp. 9–10, 39).

Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat Theory, introduced in the late 20th century, contributed significantly to these evolving discussions. Walt critiqued the traditional balance of power framework for its overemphasis on material capabilities, arguing instead that states align not simply in response to raw power but to perceived threats. These perceptions, he contended, are shaped by factors such as geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, and the perceived intentions of other states. By asserting that threat perception, rather than sheer power asymmetry, is the primary driver of alliance behavior, Walt's theory offers a more nuanced explanatory model. In this way, it broadens the analytical scope beyond conventional realist assumptions and provides a critical lens through which to examine alliance formation—particularly in complex and volatile regions such as the Middle East during the Pahlavi era. Walt's framework underscores that it is not power alone, but the perception of threat, that motivates states to seek alliances (Walt, 1987; 1988). The theory introduces several key variables that deepen our understanding of alliance dynamics beyond the traditional balance of power model:

1. **Aggregate Power:** A state's total resources—including its population size, industrial and military capabilities, and technological proficiency—constitute its aggregate power, which in turn shapes its potential to pose a threat to others. While such power may be perceived as threatening, it can also represent an opportunity, thereby prompting either balancing or bandwagoning behavior (Walt, 1987, pp. 22–23).
2. **Geographic Proximity:** The capacity to project power typically decreases with distance, meaning that states in close geographic proximity are more likely to be perceived as threats. This spatial consideration significantly influences states' alliance decisions (Walt, 1987, pp. 23–24).
3. **Offensive Capabilities:** States that possess substantial offensive military capabilities are more likely to provoke balancing responses than those constrained by geographic, technological, or logistical limitations. In this context, offensive capability is defined as the

capacity to endanger another state's sovereignty or territorial integrity (Walt, 1987, pp. 24–25).

- 4. Aggressive Intentions:** The perception that a state harbors aggressive intentions is a critical factor in prompting others to form counter-alliances against it. States believed to be expansionist or revisionist are more likely to face balancing behavior from the international community (Walt, 1988, pp. 33, 308).

Walt contended that the Balance of Threat Theory represents a substantial departure from traditional Balance of Power Theory, primarily because it incorporates intangible factors such as perceived intentions and offensive capabilities. This distinction is particularly salient in the context of the Middle East, where historical rivalries, religious ideologies, and nationalist fervor often outweigh considerations of sheer material power. In this context, the Balance of Threat framework provides a more precise and context-sensitive tool for examining alliance behavior in Pahlavi-era Iran. The alliance behavior of Iran during this period was shaped not only by the capabilities of neighboring states but also—more critically—by the perceived threats emanating from regional actors and ideological movements. The Shah's regime consistently grounded its foreign alliances in these complex threat perceptions, which encompassed concerns over both internal regime stability and regional dominance.

Accordingly, the Balance of Threat Theory provides a more comprehensive understanding of Iran's foreign policy under the Pahlavi monarchy. It accounts for the multidimensional nature of perceived threats—spanning ideological, religious, and strategic domains—and highlights how these perceptions influenced alliance behavior both in Iran and among its regional counterparts. The theory facilitates an analysis of Iran's relations with both neighboring states and global powers through the lens of perceived threat, rather than through a simplistic focus on power asymmetries. For example, Iran's alignment with the United States and other Western powers was largely motivated by the perceived threat of Soviet expansionism and the ideological spread of communism across the region. Similarly, the rise of pan-Arab nationalism under leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt was regarded as a significant ideological challenge, prompting strategic realignments by Iran at the regional level. The following sections

will examine the extent to which these perceived threats shaped Iran's international and regional alliances during the Pahlavi era, using the Balance of Threat Theory as the guiding analytical framework.

2.1. Beyond Walt: *Omnibalancing* and *Hedging*

While Walt's Balance of Threat Theory primarily addresses external threats, the Iranian case demonstrates that internal vulnerabilities and regime security concerns also shaped alliance behavior. Steven R. David's *omnibalancing* framework highlights how leaders of developing states often prioritize domestic threats—such as opposition movements, coups, or economic instability—when forging alliances (David, 1991, p. 6; Haas, 2003, p. 39). For the Pahlavi monarchy, the Tudeh Party, the Mossadegh government, and structural economic challenges significantly influenced the Shah's foreign policy choices.

At the same time, Iran's strategy in the 1960s also reveals elements of *hedging*. Rather than relying exclusively on the United States, Tehran pursued a dual approach: consolidating its strategic partnership with Washington while cautiously engaging in limited *détente* and arms agreements with Moscow (Johns, 2007; Alvandi, 2014b). This duality reflects an effort to reduce dependence on a single great power, mitigate regional threats, and safeguard regime survival under Cold War conditions. Taken together, the integration of *omnibalancing* and *hedging* into Walt's framework allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Pahlavi Iran's alliance behavior, as it captures both the external and internal dimensions of threat perception as well as the pragmatic strategies developed in response to systemic uncertainty.

In the Iranian context, the application of *omnibalancing* and *hedging* was particularly evident in the Shah's simultaneous efforts to secure regime stability and navigate Cold War power rivalries. *Omnibalancing* is reflected in the Shah's alignment with the United States to suppress internal opposition such as the Tudeh Party and the Mossadegh movement, demonstrating how domestic vulnerabilities directly informed external alliance choices. *Hedging*, on the other hand, was expressed through Iran's limited engagement with the Soviet Union despite its strong pro-Western orientation—manifested in trade agreements, controlled arms purchases,

and cautious diplomatic exchanges. These strategies collectively reveal that Tehran's foreign policy behavior was not driven by ideology alone, but by a pragmatic calculus aimed at minimizing external dependence, balancing multiple sources of threat, and ensuring the survival of the monarchy within a volatile regional and global environment.

3. The Soviet Threat and the Iran-U.S. Alliance

Although the origins of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran can be traced back to the 19th century, the alliance between the two nations took on a more concrete form in the 20th century, particularly with the establishment of the Baghdad Pact—despite the fact that the United States was not an active participant in the pact itself (Aldasam, 2013, p. 7; Miglietta, 2002, p. 44). One of the primary factors shaping the Iran–U.S. alliance, which persisted until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, was the emergence of the Soviet threat. At the onset of World War II, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who exhibited sympathies toward the Axis Powers led by Nazi Germany, ruled Iran. This alignment alarmed the Allied Powers—most notably the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom—prompting them to jointly invade Iran in 1941. Their objective was to secure regional control and preempt any Axis-aligned aggression emanating from Iranian territory. The invasion resulted in Reza Shah's forced abdication and the installation of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a figure more aligned with Western interests, on the throne.

Throughout the war, Iran remained under British and Soviet occupation. To legitimize their military presence and secure critical supply routes through Iranian territory, the occupying powers signed the Anglo-Soviet-Iranian Tripartite Treaty on January 26, 1942. The treaty recognized Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity and stipulated the withdrawal of all foreign troops within six months after the conclusion of hostilities against Germany and its allies ("Anglo-Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1942," 1979; Mark, 1975, p. 51). However, in the postwar period, the Soviet Union failed to fulfill its withdrawal obligations and instead supported separatist movements among Iran's Kurdish and Azerbaijani populations (Hasanli, 2006, p. 241).

The crisis sparked by the establishment of Soviet-backed Azerbaijani and Kurdish autonomous entities within Iranian territory brought the United States and the Soviet Union into direct confrontation for the first time—an episode widely regarded in the literature as marking the onset of the Cold War. However, Iran lacked the capacity to resolve this crisis independently (Halliday, 1992, p. 44). During World War II, at the Tehran Conference held in November–December 1943—where Allied leaders convened for the first time—Iranian monarch Mohammad Reza Shah received assurances from U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Iran’s independence and sovereignty would be respected by the Allied Powers. These assurances laid the foundation for the Iran–U.S. alliance and proved instrumental in resolving the Soviet-instigated Azerbaijan-Kurdistan separatist crisis of 1945–46 (Cossa, 1990, p. 8; Fawcett, 2014, p. 380; Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943).

At the time, Iran shared a 1,690-kilometer border with the Soviet Union and faced a significant external threat stemming from Soviet geographic proximity and considerable offensive capabilities. Compounding the situation, Mohammad Reza Shah—who had yet to consolidate his political authority—faced serious internal threats from the Soviet-supported Tudeh Party as well as from rebellious tribal factions. During the Azerbaijan crisis, the Soviet Union effectively transformed an external threat into an internal one by securing the appointment of three Tudeh Party members to ministerial posts within the Iranian cabinet (Cascon Case SOI: Soviet-Iran 1945–46, 1999). This episode illustrates how an external security challenge could evolve into a regime-security crisis, thereby linking Walt’s externally focused framework with the logic of *omnibalancing*. Aware of the Shah regime’s fragile position, Iranian elites sought to mitigate these multidimensional threats through closer alignment with the United States. As a result, the Shah appealed to American officials for alliance support and assistance in strengthening the imperial gendarmerie and the Iranian military forces (Ramazani, 2013, p. 53).

By securing military assistance from the United States to bolster its gendarmerie and armed forces, Iran achieved notable progress in strengthening its internal security apparatus. This military aid laid the

groundwork for the institutionalization of Iran–U.S. relations, which gradually evolved into a formal alliance during the 1940s (Ramazani, 2013, p. 54). A pivotal milestone in this process was the signing of the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between the two countries on May 23, 1950, under which Iran began to receive expanded military support from the United States (“Agreement between the United States of America and Iran,” 1951).

The second major development that catalyzed the transformation of Iran–U.S. relations into a full-fledged alliance emerged with the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by Iranian Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. The occupation of Iran during World War II had resulted in severe inflation and economic hardship, leading to widespread resentment toward foreign powers and occupying forces. In this climate of economic discontent and rising anti-foreign sentiment, the National Front—led by Mossadegh, who had come to power through parliamentary elections—mobilized nationalist fervor and succeeded in passing legislation to nationalize the AIOC on March 15, 1951. While this act significantly boosted Mossadegh’s popularity in domestic politics, it simultaneously posed a direct challenge to the authority of the young Shah. Facing internal instability, the Shah came under increasing pressure from Britain, which—still recovering from the aftermath of World War II and grappling with the loss of its imperial authority over India—sought to reassert its influence in Iran by urging the Shah to dismiss Mossadegh (Gasiorowski, 1987, p. 264; Şen, 2016, pp. 85–87).

While British priorities were primarily directed toward resolving the oil dispute, American concerns centered on the threat posed by the Soviet Union—the second-largest military power in the bipolar international system—to Iranian sovereignty. U.S. officials regarded the Soviet threat to Iran as “real, imminent, and dangerous,” and there were growing suspicions that Prime Minister Mossadegh might align with Soviet interests (Roosevelt, 1979, p. 11). From the American perspective, Iran possessed several strategic vulnerabilities: vast oil reserves, an extended border with the Soviet Union, an active communist party, and a nationalist prime minister whose populist appeal created uncertainty regarding Iran’s political alignment. Fearing that Iran might fall under Soviet influence, President Dwight D. Eisenhower—alongside senior officials such as

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles—authorized British proposals to depose Mossadegh and install a pro-Western government. This led to the execution of a covert joint CIA–MI6 operation, known as Operation Ajax, which successfully overthrew Mossadegh on August 19, 1953 (Gasiorowski, 1987, p. 261; Kinzer, 2004, p. 4). The coup not only restored the Shah’s authority but also repositioned Iran as a pivotal actor within the U.S.-led Western alliance in the ensuing decades. This case also highlights how Walt’s threat perception model, when expanded to incorporate domestic political instability, converges with the logic of *omnibalancing*: foreign support was sought not merely against external Soviet pressure but also to neutralize internal regime threats.

The Eisenhower administration maintained that, with sustained American support, Iran could become a “vital link in the defense of the Free World” (Ramazani, 2013, p. 55). This strategic vision was soon operationalized through the formation of the Baghdad Pact, a regional security arrangement designed to contain Soviet expansion into the Near East. The initiative began with the signing of the Pact of Mutual Cooperation and Defense between Turkey and Iraq on February 24, 1955. Its objective was to establish a regional coalition capable of resisting the southward encroachment of Soviet influence. As the United Kingdom joined on April 5, Pakistan on September 23, and Iran on November 3, the pact was transformed into a broader security framework known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) among member states (“Baghdad Pact,” 1956; Department of State, The Office of Electronic Information, 2008; Osgood, 1971, pp. 83, 103).

By joining the U.S.-backed Baghdad Pact, Iran firmly positioned itself within the so-called “Free World”—the anti-communist Western alliance—and became a major recipient of American aid. Iran also endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine, announced by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on January 5, 1957, which aimed to contain the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. The doctrine pledged to provide U.S. economic and/or military assistance to any state threatened by communism. Its emergence was largely shaped by rising anti-Western sentiment in several Arab states and the expanding Soviet footprint in Syria and Egypt following the 1956 Suez Crisis. That crisis—triggered by a joint military intervention against Egypt by the United Kingdom, France, and Israel, and subsequently

condemned by the United Nations—ignited a wave of pan-Arab nationalism and significantly elevated the regional stature of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, thereby amplifying Soviet influence across the Middle East. Within this geopolitical context, the Eisenhower Doctrine polarized the region: it was accepted by countries such as Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Afghanistan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Israel, while Egypt and Syria vehemently opposed it (Podeh, 1993; *The Eisenhower Doctrine*, 1957, 2017).

Another critical event that deepened the Iran–U.S. alliance occurred in the aftermath of the July 1958 coup in Iraq. The Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq, originally established under a British mandate, was overthrown by Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qasim and the Free Officers. Both Britain and the United States perceived the coup as a Nasserist maneuver, emblematic of the growing reach of pan-Arab nationalism. U.S. officials feared that, without swift and decisive action, similar uprisings could destabilize other allied regimes in the region. The British similarly regarded Nasser and his Baathist, pan-Arab ideology as a more immediate and existential threat than communism itself (Barrett, 2008, pp. 4–5). The loss of a key regional ally in Iraq prompted the United States to intensify support for its remaining partners, most notably Iran. Although the Soviet Union attempted to lure Iran into neutrality through generous aid offers, Shah Mohammad Reza categorically rejected them. In response to escalating regional instability, Iran and the United States signed a bilateral security agreement on March 5, 1959. This accord stipulated that the United States would undertake necessary measures—including the deployment of U.S. armed forces—in the event of an attack on Iranian territory (Osgood, 1971, p. 94; Lenczowski, 1972, pp. 54–55). These developments cemented Iran's status as a cornerstone of the U.S.-led anti-communist alliance structure in the Middle East. From the American perspective, countries bordering the Soviet Union, such as Iran, represented essential nodes in the strategic Containment Policy designed to halt Soviet geopolitical expansion (Özcan, 2019).

For Iran, U.S. support was indispensable in mitigating both external and internal threats—many of which were exacerbated by persistent economic imbalances. Through extensive aid programs, the United States played a crucial role in helping the Shah manage Iran's chronic budget deficits during

the 1960s (Rubin, 1980, pp. 91–123). Under the framework of the Mutual Security Pact, Iran received \$535.4 million in American military assistance between 1953 and 1963, enabling the Shah to expand the Iranian army from 120,000 to 200,000 personnel. This level of assistance represented the “largest aid package provided by the U.S. to any non-NATO country” during that period (Şen, 2016, p. 90). Such support not only enhanced Iran’s military capabilities against the Soviet Union but also reinforced regime stability by strengthening the Shah’s ability to control domestic opposition. This dual external–internal logic once again illustrates how alliance choices reflected both Walt’s threat perception variables and the *omnibalancing* logic of regime security.

In the 1960s, Iran initiated a significant *détente* with the Soviet Union as part of the Shah’s “Independent National Policy” strategy. In response to Soviet concerns, Iran formally declared that it would not permit the installation of foreign missile bases on its territory. This political recalibration paved the way for a series of bilateral agreements in the realms of trade, transit, and economic cooperation. The Shah’s visit to Moscow in June 1965 symbolized this diplomatic thaw and culminated in a 1967 agreement under which Iran purchased approximately \$110 million worth of Soviet weaponry (Alvandi, 2014b; Johns, 2007, p. 73). This dual orientation—maintaining strategic dependence on the United States while simultaneously engaging Moscow—represents a clear case of *hedging* in alliance politics.

This strategic shift was driven by a constellation of factors:

1. The Shah was resolute in pursuing domestic reforms and sought to reduce military expenditures, even in the face of pressure from the United States.
2. The advancement of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) technology diminished the strategic necessity of U.S. missile bases in Iran, thereby rendering Iran’s pledge to deny foreign missile installations largely irrelevant from the Soviet perspective.
3. Improved relations with the Soviet Union were perceived as a means to neutralize domestic opposition to the Shah’s ambitious development initiative—the “White Revolution”—launched in 1962.
4. The political inactivity of the Tudeh Party and the Soviet Union’s reluctance to demand that Iran sever its security ties with the West

significantly diminished Iran's perception of the Soviet threat during the early 1960s. In light of the broader context of U.S.–Soviet détente following the Cuban Missile Crisis, Iran's policy recalibration appears both rational and aligned with global trends (Walt, 1988, pp. 289–290).

Despite the thaw in relations with the Soviet Union, U.S.–Iran security cooperation remained robust, exemplified by joint military exercises conducted in 1964. Paradoxically, Iran's rapprochement with Moscow prompted the United States to increase arms transfers to Tehran in 1967 and 1968. Although the perceived threat from the Soviet Union had declined relative to earlier periods, the Shah came to regard revolutionary forces within the Middle East—particularly Nasser's Egypt—as the principal threat to Iranian national security. Within this context, Iran's procurement of weapons from the Soviet Union not only enhanced its military capabilities but also incentivized the United States to respond with comparable offers (Alvandi, 2014a, p. 36; Johns, 2007, p. 74).

Security ties between the two countries deepened further following the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine by U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1969. The doctrine articulated a shift in U.S. strategic policy, whereby the United States would provide military and economic assistance to allies facing external threats, rather than deploying American ground forces directly (Kimball, 2006, p. 59). Within this strategic framework, the United States aimed to elevate Iran and Saudi Arabia as the twin pillars of regional stability. The doctrine allowed these states to significantly expand their arms acquisitions, facilitated by growing oil revenues that enhanced their financial capacity. As a result, Iran's arms purchases surged from \$103.6 million in 1970 to \$552.7 million in 1972, while Saudi Arabia's rose from \$15.8 million to \$312.4 million during the same period (Gause III, 2009, p. 22). With virtually unrestricted access to American weaponry, the Shah adopted a more assertive regional policy aimed at countering “radical forces,” which he identified as the principal threat to the stability of his regime—doing so with the overt support of his Western allies (Ramazani, 1976, pp. 173–186).

On the Soviet front, the Shah maintained bilateral relations with Moscow despite Iran's close alliance with the United States. However, these relations began to deteriorate after 1973, largely due to the growing threat posed by Iraq, which had signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with

the Soviet Union in 1972. A confluence of internal and external factors—including rapid and uneven economic development, the political fragility of the monarchy, the formation of a broad-based opposition coalition, the mobilizing force of Shi'a Islam, and the volatility of the international system—ultimately led to Mohammad Reza Shah's departure from Iran and the eruption of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, thereby bringing the Iran–U.S. alliance to an end (Halliday, 1992, pp. 23–45). Defined by the slogan “Neither East nor West, Only the Islamic Republic” (*Na Sharq, na Gharb, faqat Jumhuri-ye Islami*), the revolution prompted the newly established Islamic Republic to reinterpret its national interests through both ideological and historical lenses. As a result, the United States and Israel—formerly strategic allies under the Pahlavi regime—were redefined as principal sources of threat by the post-revolutionary leadership.

From the perspective of alliance theories, it becomes evident that Iran's alliance behavior throughout the Cold War aligns closely with the core tenets of the Balance of Threat Theory. According to this framework, alliances are not merely responses to power imbalances but are instead shaped by perceptions of threat. In this context, the Shah's pursuit of an alliance with the United States was driven by the perceived Soviet threat in foreign affairs, as well as domestic threats from actors such as Prime Minister Mossadegh and the Tudeh Party—challenges he was unable to confront independently. A closer examination of the Iran–U.S. alliance reveals that it was not only external pressures but also internal vulnerabilities that informed Tehran's strategic alignment. Indeed, the Shah's policy of *détente* with the Soviet Union during the 1960s coincided with a decline in the perceived Soviet threat. Conversely, intensifying threats from regional actors—particularly Iraq and Egypt—led the Shah to pursue supplementary regional alliances alongside his enduring strategic partnership with the United States.

Taken together, the trajectory of Iran–U.S. relations during the Pahlavi era demonstrates a recurring sequence in alliance politics: specific events generated acute perceptions of threat, which in turn prompted strategic responses and produced new alliance configurations. The Soviet occupation and the Azerbaijan crisis led to an early U.S.–Iran alignment; the Mossadegh oil nationalization crisis and Operation Ajax reinforced reliance on Western support; the 1958 Iraqi coup consolidated Tehran's security partnership with Washington; and finally, the 1960s *détente* with

Moscow exemplified a *hedging* strategy under Cold War uncertainty. From a theoretical perspective, these episodes reveal that while Walt's Balance of Threat Theory captures the centrality of external threats, the Iranian case underscores the importance of regime-security concerns and internal vulnerabilities. By integrating the insights of *omnibalancing* and *hedging*, the explanatory power of the Balance of Threat framework is significantly enhanced in accounting for Pahlavi Iran's alliance behavior.

4. Regional Alliances Formed in Response to Diverse Threats

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Soviet Union represented a major external threat to Iran; however, in the ensuing decades, a new wave of regional instability emerged as monarchies in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq were overthrown through military coups. The ideological and revolutionary nature of these newly established republican regimes constituted a significant challenge to the Shah's monarchical rule. In response, while maintaining its strategic alliance with the United States, Iran simultaneously continued arms purchases from the Soviet Union and sought to counterbalance regional threats by forging various alliance platforms with countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel (Be'eri, 1982; Chubin & Zabih, 1974, Chapter 3; Haddad, 1965). This dual orientation—anchoring security in the U.S. partnership while cautiously engaging with Moscow—demonstrated an early form of *hedging*, as Tehran attempted to reduce its exposure to a single external partner while countering radical regional threats.

Among the key regional alliances was the Baghdad Pact, initially conceived as a collective security arrangement to contain Soviet expansion in the Middle East. However, the Pact suffered a major setback in 1958 when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in a coup, and Iraq, under the new military leadership of Abdul Karim Qasim, withdrew from the alliance. The revolutionary regime in Baghdad, characterized by an aggressive foreign policy posture, quickly emerged as a new source of threat to Iran. The most vocal regional opposition to the Baghdad Pact came from Egypt, where the monarchy had also been toppled by a military coup, and where President Gamal Abdel Nasser had risen to power. Nasser denounced the Pact as a Western imperialist project designed to obstruct Arab unity. His staunch anti-Western stance, combined with his aspirations for regional leadership,

led him to actively support revolutionary movements across the Middle East (Ayyubids, 2013, pp. 58–60; *Egypt and The Middle East*, 1964). In addition, Egypt sought to diplomatically isolate Iran by exploiting Tehran's close ties with Israel, the internal religious unrest provoked by the Shah's reformist agenda, and Iran's broader tensions with the Arab world (Chubin & Zabih, 1974, pp. 14–146). These maneuvers exemplify how external revolutionary regimes could exacerbate domestic fragilities, thus merging Walt's threat perception model with the *omnibalancing* logic of regime security.

In addition to Nasser's assertive regional initiatives, the emergence of Iraq as a new strategic threat contributed to the transformation of the Baghdad Pact into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and prompted the Shah to pursue supplementary regional alliances. Unlike NATO, CENTO lacked an integrated military command structure and, despite being backed by the United States, did not include Washington as a formal member. Iran, recognizing the limitations of this arrangement, sought to reform CENTO into a more robust military and economic framework capable of ensuring regional security. Central to Iran's efforts was its aspiration to eventually join NATO, which promised broader strategic protection under the Western security umbrella. Although this objective was never realized, Iran remained a committed member of CENTO until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, while simultaneously advancing its bilateral alliance initiatives (Göktepe, 1999, p. 126).

A major inflection point in Iran's regional security strategy occurred in 1968, when the United Kingdom announced its decision to withdraw its military presence from territories "east of Suez." This development introduced both significant risks and potential opportunities for Iran. The British military presence had served as a stabilizing force and a protective buffer for Iran, particularly against threats emanating from the Persian Gulf (Sato, 2009, pp. 99, 105). However, with the United States preoccupied by the Vietnam War and hesitant to assume direct military responsibility in the region, the British withdrawal created a power vacuum that enabled increased Soviet maneuverability. This alteration in the regional balance of threat compelled Iran to adopt a more autonomous posture, relying on its own military capabilities and regional alliances to safeguard national interests (Owen, 1972, pp. 75–76; Şen, 2016, p. 104). In theoretical terms, the Shah's policy

shift illustrates a *hedging* logic: while Iran remained closely aligned with Washington, it simultaneously invested in independent military capacity to reduce vulnerability to both Soviet and regional pressures.

In response, the Shah concentrated on addressing three principal strategic concerns. First, he sought to protect the regime from subversive activities by domestic opposition groups supported by foreign states or transnational movements. Second, he prioritized securing the safe and uninterrupted passage of maritime traffic through key waterways—the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf, and the Shatt al-Arab. Third, he focused on safeguarding Iran's vital oil infrastructure, ensuring the protection of offshore and onshore energy resources and facilities from both accidental and deliberate threats (Ramazani, 1976, pp. 173–174). These objectives reflected not only external strategic imperatives but also the *omnibalancing* dimension of regime survival, since internal unrest and foreign-backed opposition movements were consistently framed by the Shah as threats on par with external rivals.

Within this strategic context, the Persian Gulf region emerged as a top security priority for Iranian elites, shaping both their threat perceptions and regional policy agendas. This heightened sensitivity was driven by three principal concerns: (1) skepticism regarding CENTO's capacity to effectively address regional security challenges, (2) tensions and unresolved disputes with other Gulf states, and (3) uncertainty surrounding the future stability of the Trucial States—namely Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar (Ramazani, 1976, p. 174). Against this backdrop, Iran successfully persuaded both the United States and the United Kingdom—as well as their regional partners—to declare their collective commitment to counter “disruptive threats” in the Gulf. Iran consistently emphasized the strategic importance of Gulf security at every CENTO meeting. During a press conference held on January 27, 1968, Iranian Prime Minister Amir-Abbas Hoveyda addressed Gulf states, declaring that as the “most powerful” actor in the region, Iran “naturally” attached great importance to Gulf stability and stood ready to cooperate with any littoral state committed to preserving it (Ramazani, 1976, p. 174). This demonstrates how Iran sought to turn the risks of British withdrawal into an opportunity for regional leadership, embedding its policies within a balance of threat rationale while simultaneously pursuing autonomy through *hedging*.

Despite these overtures toward regional cooperation, Iran's ambitions were increasingly undermined by the rise of Arab nationalism and political instability resulting from the Arab–Israeli conflicts. The growing prominence of pan-Arabism across the Gulf, coupled with closer political and ideological ties between Gulf states and broader Arab nationalist movements, further complicated the Shah's vision of a cohesive Gulf security architecture (Şen, 2016, p. 98; Gause III, 2003, p. 278). At the forefront of Arab nationalist sentiment was Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to diplomatically isolate Iran. Exploiting the historically weak ties between Iran and the Gulf sheikhdoms, Nasser portrayed Iran's regional objectives as being aligned with Zionist interests. Following Nasser's lead, the Ba'athist republican regimes in Iraq and Syria adopted similarly antagonistic stances toward Iran in their regional policies (Walt, 1985, p. 11, 16).

The threat posed by these “leftist” and “radical” republican regimes prompted Iran to deepen its diplomatic and strategic relationships with conservative monarchies, including King Hussein of Jordan, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia. The foundation for the emerging Iran–Saudi Arabia alliance was laid under the framework of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. With the United States unwilling to continue playing the role of regional policeman, the doctrine sought to delegate that responsibility to its key allies—Iran and Saudi Arabia. Known as the “Twin Pillars” policy, this strategic vision aimed to elevate both countries into regional power brokers with American support, thereby preserving stability. In practice, however, the United States primarily channeled its political and military backing toward Iran (McGlinchey, 2013, p. 848). This sequence—radical coups in Egypt and Iraq, followed by Iran's diplomatic isolation and culminating in the consolidation of ties with conservative monarchies—illustrates the classic progression in alliance politics, whereby precipitating events generate specific threat perceptions that prompt strategic responses and produce new alignments.

Within this strategic framework, Iran extended military assistance to royalist forces in Yemen, fighting against republican factions backed by Nasser. This effort was undertaken in coordination with Jordan and Saudi Arabia and reflected the Shah's broader strategy to contain revolutionary currents across the region and bolster monarchist regimes against republican

encroachment (Chubin & Zabih, 1974, p. 156). From a theoretical standpoint, the Shah's activism in Yemen illustrates *omnibalancing* logic: external threats posed by revolutionary republican states were perceived as directly linked to internal vulnerabilities, compelling Tehran to align with like-minded monarchies to preserve its own regime security.

During the Shah's reign, Iran maintained an economic, military, and intelligence partnership with Israel—an arrangement widely characterized in the literature as an “unofficial marriage,” particularly in light of the abrupt and complete rupture in relations that followed the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Kaye et al., 2011, p. 9). Although Iran had officially opposed the establishment of Israel—Iran voted against United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 in November 1947, which proposed the termination of the Palestine Mandate and the partition of the territory into separate Jewish and Arab states—it did not formally recognize Israel in 1950. Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s, Iran had permitted the establishment of a permanent Israeli delegation in Tehran, effectively granting Israel de facto diplomatic status. However, this did not amount to de jure recognition. The Shah believed that overt relations with Israel would jeopardize Iran's ties with Arab states and provoke regional hostility toward Iran's policies in the Persian Gulf (Parsi, 2006, p. 500; Ramazani, 1978, p. 414). At the same time, strategic cooperation with Israel was deemed essential to counterbalance the perceived threats posed by the Soviet Union and its Arab allies. As a result, the Iran–Israel alliance operated covertly through front companies engaged in extensive economic and energy collaboration (Bialer, 2007, p. 50).

In the sphere of intelligence and security cooperation, the Shah took deliberate steps to obscure Iran's relationship with Israel. He delegated responsibility for managing bilateral ties to SAVAK (the Organization of Intelligence and National Security), Iran's secret police, which had been established in the 1950s with American assistance. In 1957, the Shah instructed Iranian intelligence services to initiate collaboration with Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, and designated the Iranian Foreign Ministry to handle covert and sensitive diplomatic exchanges with the Jewish state. Iranian military officers and SAVAK personnel received secret training from Mossad operatives in Israel. The training programs included hundreds of Iranian pilots, paratroopers, and artillery specialists,

and Israel also supplied Iran with advanced military equipment. According to a former Iranian ambassador, Mossad additionally provided SAVAK agents with instruction in interrogation and torture techniques (Afkhami, 2009; Parsi, 2007a, pp. 28–29; Sobhani, 1989, p. 27).

The foundation of the Iran–Israel alliance in the 1950s and 1960s was rooted in shared threat perceptions—namely, the strategic imperative to counter the Soviet Union, the necessity of a non-Arab coalition to oppose the Nasserite pan-Arab movement, and the mutual vulnerabilities both states faced in an increasingly hostile regional environment (Parsi, 2007b, p. 29). Although the Shah’s regime never formally recognized Israel, the two countries sustained a covert but durable partnership anchored in common security concerns. From the Israeli perspective, Iran was regarded as the “crown jewel” of its periphery strategy—a doctrine formulated by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in the 1950s. According to this doctrine, Israel sought to establish strong alliances with non-Arab states on the periphery of the Arab world as a strategic buffer against hostile neighboring Arab regimes (Alpher, 2015, p. 3; Shlaim, 2001, p. 195).

Israel’s perception of Iraq as a significant security threat further reinforced the strategic logic underpinning its alliance with Iran. In the 1960s, both Iran and Israel provided support to Iraqi Kurdish factions resisting the central government in Baghdad, viewing the Ba’athist regime as a mutual adversary (Mamikonian, 2005, p. 395). The Shah’s alignment with Israel deepened following Israel’s military success in the 1967 Six-Day War against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The war bolstered Israel’s regional credibility and reaffirmed the strategic value of the Iran–Israel alliance, which endured until the sweeping geopolitical and ideological reorientation brought about by the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Kaye et al., 2011, p. 11). This case highlights once more how alliance choices combined Walt’s external threat framework with *omnibalancing* logic: regional adversaries like Egypt, Iraq, and Syria were perceived as external threats that simultaneously amplified Iran’s internal regime-security concerns, while covert cooperation with Israel functioned as a *hedging* mechanism to counterbalance radical Arab republican regimes.

Taken together, Iran’s regional alliances during the Pahlavi era reveal a dynamic process in which shifting threats continuously shaped Tehran’s strategic orientation. The collapse of regional monarchies and the

emergence of republican, pan-Arab regimes such as Egypt, Iraq, and Syria prompted the Shah to strengthen ties with conservative monarchies and to cultivate covert cooperation with Israel. The British withdrawal from the Gulf, combined with the structural weaknesses of CENTO, further encouraged Iran to seek greater autonomy while carefully balancing among major powers. Each episode unfolded through a recurring sequence in which political events generated specific threat perceptions, these perceptions produced strategic responses, and those responses ultimately gave rise to new alliance configurations. From a theoretical perspective, these developments confirm the explanatory value of Walt's Balance of Threat framework, while also showing that it must be complemented by *omnibalancing*—which emphasizes regime security and internal vulnerabilities—and by the logic of *hedging*, which reflects Iran's attempt to manage uncertainty by engaging both allies and rivals. This integrated framework offers a fuller and more coherent understanding of Pahlavi Iran's regional alignments and their underlying motivations.

5. Conclusion

Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat Theory posits that states form formal or informal alliances primarily to counter perceived threats. Within this theoretical framework, threats are assumed to be external and are defined by four principal variables: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987, pp. 37–40). This study has applied Walt's framework to analyze Iran's alliance behavior from 1925 to 1979, demonstrating that Iranian foreign policy and alliance strategies during the Pahlavi era were fundamentally shaped by threat perceptions consistent with the core tenets of the theory. Over the course of the 20th century, Iran underwent a series of profound domestic and geopolitical transformations that directly influenced its approach to managing threats. Under the leadership of Reza Shah and later Mohammad Reza Shah, foreign policy was primarily driven by the perceived danger of Soviet expansionism, the destabilizing influence of revolutionary Arab regimes, and recurrent domestic political vulnerabilities.

Throughout the Pahlavi period, Iran's alliance behavior can be understood as an effort to balance multiple dimensions of threat. The Soviet Union

represented a significant external danger through its military proximity and support for separatist movements within Iran. This perception of threat prompted Tehran to forge a close strategic partnership with the United States. American military and economic assistance enabled Iran not only to counterbalance Soviet geopolitical influence but also to suppress Soviet-backed domestic opposition groups. In this regard, the Iran–U.S. alliance functioned as a critical instrument in the Shah’s broader security strategy, illustrating how external and internal threats converged in shaping alliance behavior.

Internal political challenges—ranging from the Soviet-supported Tudeh Party to the nationalist movement led by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh—played a pivotal role in reinforcing the value of a strong alliance with the United States. These threats underscored that alliance formation was not solely a reaction to external dangers but also a means of preserving regime stability. The fact that foreign partnerships were leveraged to counter both external rivals and internal dissent reflects the logic of *omnibalancing*, whereby leaders of vulnerable states balance simultaneously against internal and external sources of insecurity.

During the 1960s and 1970s, regional developments added further complexity to Iran’s alliance orientation. The revolutionary regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, supported by pan-Arabist agendas, constituted significant sources of insecurity. In response, Iran pursued regional balancing by cultivating ties with conservative monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan and by maintaining clandestine cooperation with Israel. These partnerships helped Tehran counter the influence of radical Arab states and mitigate the risk of diplomatic isolation. At the same time, Iran’s strategy of engaging the United States while cautiously cooperating with the Soviet Union through limited *détente* and arms purchases represented a form of *hedging*—a dual-track policy designed to reduce dependence on any single great power and to insure against uncertainty in the international system.

Taken together, Iran’s alliance behavior during the Pahlavi era followed a recurring sequence: specific events generated acute threat perceptions, which in turn prompted strategic responses and produced new alliance configurations. The Soviet-backed separatist crisis of 1945–46, the Mossadegh oil nationalization and 1953 coup, the 1958 Iraqi revolution,

and the 1967 Arab–Israeli War each triggered recalibrations in Iran's foreign alignments. From a theoretical perspective, these episodes affirm the explanatory power of Walt's Balance of Threat Theory, while also showing that it gains greater analytical depth when combined with the concepts of *omnibalancing* and *hedging*. Walt's framework explains how external threats structured Iran's alliances, *omnibalancing* captures the regime-security dimension, and *hedging* accounts for Tehran's pragmatic efforts to navigate Cold War uncertainty.

Beyond its empirical findings, this study offers a conceptual contribution to alliance theory by bridging the gap between Walt's Balance of Threat framework and approaches that emphasize regime security and strategic flexibility. By integrating the notions of *omnibalancing* and *hedging*, it demonstrates how external and internal threat perceptions interact to shape alliance behavior in semi-peripheral states. This synthesis provides a more nuanced analytical lens for understanding the foreign policy of middle powers operating under systemic uncertainty—offering insights that extend beyond the Iranian case and contribute to broader theoretical debates in international relations.

In conclusion, Iran's alliance strategies under the Pahlavi dynasty were shaped by a multilayered threat environment encompassing the Soviet Union, revolutionary Arab regimes, and domestic political opposition. The Shah's alignment choices reflected not only a response to external pressures but also the imperative of safeguarding regime survival. This study thus demonstrates that the Balance of Threat Theory, when enriched with insights from *omnibalancing* and *hedging*, offers a more comprehensive and convincing explanation of Iran's alliance behavior during a volatile period in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

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