

**(U) "ZENDEBAD, SHAH!":
THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
AND THE FALL OF IRANIAN PRIME MINISTER
MOHAMMED MOSSADEQ, AUGUST 1953**

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(U) Source and Classification Note

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(U) I have also examined relevant records from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the National Security Agency. These records were not as plentiful or as helpful as I had hoped. I was nonetheless able to fill in some gaps with documents from these organizations. The vast majority of surviving documents on the operation itself remain with CIA, but for the reasons provided below even these are not as numerous as one might expect

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5 (U) Copies of cables sent ^I_[during the operation also were among the files the Division destroyed in its attempt to gain more filing space. At the time, the copies were already nine years old and no one thought that they were important. A record copy may have remained in the Agency's former Cable Secretariat for some time, but such records too have long since disappeared in routine house cleanings. An extensive search of CIA's archives has failed to uncover any surviving copies.

early 1980s, CIA's History Staff prepared transcripts of these documents and sent them to the Department of State's Office of the Historian, then researching a volume of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series. There is every reason to believe that these transcripts, produced under the supervision of a professional historian, are authentic. The matters in the transcripts correspond in sequence and subject with events as we know them.

(U) The microfilm itself apparently has been destroyed, in accordance with National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) guidelines. According to NARA, the microfilm had to be kept for 20 years and then could be destroyed. The record of destruction had to be kept for five years, at which point it too could be destroyed.

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(U) Some readers may think that this study is over-classified, but many of the crucial documents are still top secret after almost 50 years. Since this handful of documents contains information critical to the story, I have decided to use the material they contain even if it means restricting the potential readership.

Scott A. Koch
1 June 1998

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Chapter 1

(U) Iran and the United States to 1951

(U) During the height of the Cold War in the 1950s, Washington considered the Middle East in general and Iran in particular to be among the great strategic prizes in the geopolitical and ideological struggle against the Soviet Union. It was not always so. For almost 175 years, American policymakers ignored Iran because they had no reason to do otherwise.

(U) That changed during World War II and the immediate postwar years. During the war, Iran was an important route for American aid to the Soviet Army, engaged in a life-or-death struggle with Hitler's *Wehrmacht*.¹ Soviet troops remained in northern Iran immediately after the war, encouraging pro-Communist separatist regimes in Iranian Azerbaijan and in the Kurdish region. For a time it appeared to Washington that Moscow would demand the "unification" of Iranian Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan, but this problem evaporated once Stalin understood that the United States would not permit such an aggressive move.²

(U) The United States would have preferred to withdraw from the Persian Gulf after the end of World War II, but the postwar British retreat and retrenchment "East of Suez" created a vacuum that the US felt obligated to fill. After London announced that it could no longer supply military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey, President Harry Truman publicly declared in March 1947 that the United States would support free peoples everywhere, "resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside

¹(U) Eventually, almost a quarter of American aid for the Soviet Union came through Iran. Convoys using more northern routes lost about 20% of their cargoes to the Nazis; only 8% of cargoes sent to the Persian Gulf for shipment through Iran were lost. See, Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 284, 404.

²(U) See, Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977); Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-73*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974); and John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) for a discussion of the Azeri crisis in early 1946.

pressures."³ For Iran, the Truman Doctrine—as this pledge came to be known—meant that the United States was replacing Britain as the main geopolitical counterweight to the Russians.

(U) For the first three years after President Truman's declaration, the United States paid relatively little attention to Iran even though that oil-rich country was experiencing serious economic problems, widespread discontent with the government, and growing agitation by the Tudeh—Iran's Communist Party.

(U) Even without the most basic intelligence on Iran, two elements drove American foreign policy in the post-war Persian Gulf region: oil and the fear that political instability might jeopardize Western access to oil. Ever since Shah Muzaffar al-Din

³(U) *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, Harry S. Truman (Washington, DC, 1947), p. 170

granted William Knox D'Arcy an oil concession covering three-fourths of Persia (as Iran was known until 1935), Iranian oil had helped fuel the British economy in peace and war.⁸ The United States was then producing enough oil for its needs, but it knew that Western Europe depended on oil exports from the Middle East. In January 1951, nine months after Hillenkoetter's letter to Acheson, the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of National Estimates (ONE) wrote that the British economy would suffer if it lost Iranian oil. The loss of *all* Middle Eastern oil, ONE said, would have profound and far-reaching consequences for the economies of the Western bloc.⁹

(U) Political instability in the Middle East and the Gulf region threatened the continuing supply of oil to the West

Before the Cold War, the domestic politics of what later came to be called the Third World had made no impact on American foreign policy decisionmaking. During the Cold War, Washington could not afford the luxury of indifference because doing so would spur Soviet intrigue. Domestic politics almost anywhere abroad—and especially in strategically valuable areas—became important arenas for the international ideological struggle between East and West. Washington was determined to win this struggle through policies promoting long-term democratization. The result, American officials hoped, would be stability—and victory.

(U) Twisting the British Lion's Tail: Mohammed Mossadeq Nationalizes the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

(U) An Islamic fundamentalist assassinated Iranian Prime Minister General Ali Razmara on 7 March 1951.¹¹ Razmara's death set in motion a series of events that were to bring American and British officials face to face with Mohammed Mossadeq, one of the most mercurial, maddening, adroit, and provocative leaders with whom they had ever dealt.¹²

⁸(U) One of the reasons the British Government eventually took over D'Arcy's concession when he ran into financial difficulties was to ensure a secure supply of oil for the Royal Navy. See, Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: the Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 137, 140-42, 151.

⁹(U) NIE-14, 8 January 1951, *The Importance of Iranian and Middle East Oil to Western Europe Under Peacetime Conditions*, pp. 1-2. CIA estimated that if all Middle Eastern oil were lost, the non-Soviet world would have to impose an immediate and mandatory 10% cutback in consumption. In that event, the United States would have to implement rationing even though domestic production in those days met its own needs.

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(U) Mossadeq's immediate concern was a struggle for control of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). By 1950 the British oil concession in Iran, which the Shah had renewed in 1949, was a sore point in relations between the two countries. In March 1951, when Mossadeq was a member of the Majlis (the Iranian Parliament), he submitted a bill, which the Majlis quickly passed, nationalizing AIOC. He signed the bill into law on 1 May 1951, just three days after the Shah appointed him Prime Minister. Nationalization went into effect on 2 May 1951 and was made retroactive to 20 March 1951.

(U) AIOC's nationalization brought Mossadeq and Iran into immediate conflict with Britain. The British government owned half of AIOC's stock and did not intend to let Mossadeq nationalize its assets without adequate compensation as required under international law.¹⁴

(U) Britain Responds to "The Antics of Incomprehensible Orientals"

(U) The two countries tried to resolve the dispute, but differing negotiating styles and the personalities involved hindered these efforts. Many Britons found Mossadeq's seemingly impossible demands and unpredictably shifting arguments inexplicable. L.P. Elwell-Sutton captured the mood of British policymakers at the time when he wrote, "Really, it seemed hardly fair that dignified and correct western statesmanship should be defeated by the antics of incomprehensible orientals."¹⁵

(U) Mossadeq found the British evil, not incomprehensible. He and millions of Iranians believed that for centuries Britain had manipulated their country for British ends. Many Iranians seemed convinced that British intrigue was at the root of every domestic misfortune. In 1951 Mossadeq told US Special Envoy W. Averell Harriman, "You do not know how crafty they [the British] are. You do not know how evil they are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch." Harriman protested that surely the British

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¹⁵(U) L.P. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil: A Study in Power Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1955), p. 258.

were like people everywhere; some bad, some good. Mossadeq was not persuaded. "You do not know them," he insisted. "You do not know them."¹⁶

(U) When it seemed clear that Tehran had no intention of compensating London for AIOC's assets, the British mounted a multi-pronged effort to reassert control over the company. They hoped legal and economic pressure would convince Mossadeq to settle on British terms. If not, they were prepared to force him from office and replace him with someone open to compromise on terms favorable to the AIOC.

(U) London first asked the International Court of Justice to arbitrate the dispute. Mossadeq rejected two British proposals because neither of them addressed the issue of Iran's sovereignty over its own oil. The British thereafter refused to deal directly with Mossadeq. They used economic weapons and then tried ostentatious military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf to try to weaken Mossadeq's negotiating position.

(U) In September 1951, Britain placed an embargo on shipments of steel, sugar, iron, and oil-processing equipment shipments to Iran—that is, on almost anything that the Iranians could exchange for dollars. The AIOC laid off 20,000 oil workers at the port at Abadan and Mossadeq had to put them on the government payroll. Gradually, the flow of Iranian oil to the rest of the world stopped.

(U) A British airborne brigade arrived in Cyprus and a Royal Navy cruiser and four destroyers exercised near the oil facilities at Abadan. The display of British force did not intimidate Mossadeq; he announced that the first shot would start a world war.

(U) Britain also considered covert action options while it maneuvered diplomatically and militarily. According to C.M. Woodhouse, MI6's Chief of Station in Tehran, the idea of overthrowing Mossadeq came from the Foreign Office, not British intelligence. Woodhouse himself thought that any move against Mossadeq had to have American support and participation. London had neither until the inauguration of President Dwight Eisenhower in January 1953.¹⁷

¹⁶(U) Vernon A. Walters, *Silent Missions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 247-48.

¹⁷ (U) C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada, 1982), pp. 110-111.

(U) Mossadeq Challenges the Shah

(U) At the same time that he was quarreling with the British, Mossadeq also was struggling against the Shah. He insisted that the Shah should reign and not rule. To that end, he worked to enhance the power of the Majlis at the Shah's expense. The flash point came in July 1952, when Mossadeq resigned during a dispute over whether the Shah or the Prime Minister should appoint the war minister.

(U) During the elections for the 17th Majlis earlier in the year, vote-tampering by the Iranian Royal Court had convinced Mossadeq that the government's survival depended on control of the military. On 16 July he demanded the right to appoint himself minister of war. The Shah refused and Mossadeq resigned.¹⁹ Mossadeq appealed directly to the public and accused the Shah of violating the Constitution.

(U) Mossadeq's resignation initially appeared to be a shrewd political move that underscored his mastery of Iranian politics and his ability to gauge and exploit public opinion. The Shah appointed Ahmad Qavam, Prime Minister during the Azeri crisis with the Soviet Union in 1947, to succeed Mossadeq. In response, the National Front, a broad coalition formed in 1949, organized mass demonstrations in Tehran demanding Mossadeq's return. The demonstrations turned violent—69 people died and more than 750 were injured—but the Shah refused to use the police or the military to restore order. Qavam lacked broad support and was unable to organize counter-demonstrations. For five days the National Front controlled the streets of Tehran and other cities. On 21 July 1952 the Shah bowed to the pressure and replaced Qavam with Mossadeq.²⁰

(U) Once back in power, Mossadeq struck back at the Shah and the military. He transferred Reza Shah's lands back to the State, appointed himself Minister of War, forced the Shah's twin sister Princess Ashraf to leave the country, and forbade Mohammed Reza Pahlavi from communicating directly with foreign diplomats. By May

¹⁹(U) M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 186. Mossadeq wrote

I cannot continue in office without having the responsibility for the Ministry of War, and since Your Majesty did not concede to this, I feel I do not enjoy the full confidence of the Sovereign and, therefore, offer my resignation to pave the way for another government which might be able to carry out Your Majesty's wishes.

(U) Sepehr Zabih, *The Mossadegh Era* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1982), p. 40.

²⁰(U) Ibid., p. 265. The National Front was a loose coalition of political parties professing liberal democratic aims and opposing foreign intervention in Iranian affairs. The National Front included the leftist, anti-Soviet intellectuals of the Iran Party; the workers and leftist intellectuals of the Toilers' Party; and the workers, bazaar merchants, and Islamic clergy of the Mujahedeen-i-Islam (Warriors of Islam) Party. Ayatollah Abul Quassem Kashani, later instrumental in the coup against Mossadeq, was one of the leaders of the Warriors of Islam. The ultranationalist Pan-Iranist Party, affiliated with the National Front but not a member, included many lower class toughs. The Tudeh (Iranian Communist Party) was not a member of the National Front but included itself among the parties opposing the government. Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (Aug. 1987): 262.

1953, according to Iranian specialist Ervand Abrahamian, "the shah had been stripped of all the powers he had fought for and recovered since August 1941."²¹

(U) The Prime Minister also seized the opportunity to purge the Iranian officer corps. He forcibly retired many Royalist officers, and cut the military budget 15%. To add to the insult, Mossadeq transferred 15,000 men from the military to the Gendarmerie, the military's bureaucratic rival. These acts fueled smoldering resentment among the dismissed officers and those few royalists escaping Mossadeq's purge.²²

(U) Mossadeq used his popularity and ability to control the streets of Tehran to good advantage. When the British appeared intransigent during the oil negotiations, he simply severed diplomatic relations in October 1952. All British personnel left the country in an overland exodus at the beginning of November 1952.²³

(U) Mossadeq's apparent political triumph rapidly turned sour. The National Front began to unravel in late 1952 and early 1953 as the Prime Minister grew increasingly dictatorial. By November 1952, Ayatollah Abul Quassem Kashani, a key Islamic cleric in the National Front, had turned against Mossadeq and quit the Front, as had Mozaffar Baqai's Toilers' Party. Kashani's defection was a particularly hard blow because his group, the Warriors of Islam, included the bazaar merchants of Tehran and many mullahs (Islamic clerics). Support from these two groups historically has been critical to Iranian governments.²⁴

(U) The reasons for the defections were complex. Although 30 of the 79 deputies of the 17th Majlis, convened in February 1952, belonged to or identified with the National Front, they represented different constituencies and interests were united only in their opposition to the British. In addition, nationalization of the AIOC did not produce the bonanza for Iran that Mossadeq had hoped it would. He began to demand more and more power from the Majlis, and when the legislature granted the Prime Minister what amounted to dictatorial powers, Ayatollah Kashani resigned as Majlis speaker. Toilers' Party leader Mozaffar Baqai compared Mossadeq to Hitler and praised the army as a bulwark against Communism.²⁵

(U) Some groups in the National Front continued to back Mossadeq. The Iran Party still supported him, as did the Third Force, a splinter group expelled from the Toilers' Party.²⁶ The Prime Minister also could still count on the backing of the Qashqai

²¹(U) Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 272-73.

²²(U) *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²³ (U) Before leaving the country, C.M. Woodhouse ensured that all British contacts, like the Rashidian Brothers, would remain active. Roger Goiran helped him. Woodhouse, p. 116.

²⁴ (U) Manucher Farmanfarmaian in his memoirs describes the bazaar and the relationship of its merchants with the mullahs. "It [the bazaar] was a world unto itself, impregnable to the army, which could not easily enter its labyrinthine alleys. The leaders of the bazaar were weighty men, often tightly allied with the mollahs, and they could start riots or shut down the bazaar to instant political effect." Manucher Farmanfarmaian and Roxane Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: Memoirs of a Persian Prince* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 36.

²⁵(U) Abrahamian, pp. 269, 277; Gasiorowski, p. 269.

²⁶(U) Abrahamian, p. 277; Gasiorowski, p. 269.

tribes and—more ominously—the Tudeh, Iran's Communist Party. As support for Mossadeq narrowed, the Tudeh would soon be the only group willing to take to the streets on his behalf

(U) Ayatollah Kashani's defection and increased squabbling among the deputies effectively paralyzed the Majlis. Opposition politicians—including former Mossadeq allies like Kashani—blocked the Prime Minister's legislation. In early June 1953, fistfights broke out in the Majlis. The Prime Minister won a temporary victory when Abdullah Moazemi, a Mossadeq supporter, succeeded Kashani as speaker in a close Majlis vote (41 to 31) on 1 July 1953. Mossadeq recognized, however, that the Majlis was hopelessly deadlocked and that dissolution and new elections were necessary to break the stalemate.²⁷

(U) Under the Iranian constitution only the Shah could dissolve the Majlis. The government could request him to do so. Mossadeq knew the Shah would not agree to such a proposal, so he devised a plan to achieve the same end. He asked all National Front members and supporters to resign, which they did, and simultaneously announced the dissolution of the Majlis. The Iranian people, he held, could ratify or reject his decision in a referendum on the theory that popular will superseded the constitution. Iranian scholar Ervand Abrahamian has noted the irony in Mossadeq's rationale. "Mossadeq, the constitutional lawyer who had meticulously quoted the fundamental laws against the shah," Abrahamian wrote, "was now bypassing the same laws and resorting to the theory of the general will."²⁸

(U) From 3 to 10 August 1953, Iranians voted on Mossadeq's bold and unconstitutional act. The results of the rigged election were never in doubt. Mossadeq purposely excluded rural areas from the balloting, ostensibly because it would take too long to count the votes from remote areas. The ballot was not secret, and there were separate polling places for "yes" and "no." In the end, Mossadeq claimed victory, gaining "over 2,043,300 of the 2,044,600 ballots cast throughout the country and 101,396 of the 101,463 ballots cast in the capital."²⁹

(U) The dissolution of the Majlis and the tainted referendum alienated Iranian liberals and conservatives alike. Jamal Imami, a pro-British member of the Majlis, warned that Mossadeq was leading the country toward anarchy. Ayatollah Kashani declared the referendum illegal under Islamic religious law. At his trial in late 1953, Mossadeq defended his actions on the grounds of popular sovereignty. "In view of the Royal Court's flagrant interference in the electoral process, we had to suspend the

²⁷(U) Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 75.

²⁸(U) Abrahamian, p. 274; M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 187.

²⁹(U) Zabih, p. 111; Abrahamian, p. 274. See also, Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.), pp. 187-88. In an interview appearing in the 22 August 1962 issue of *Deutsche Zeitung*, Mossadeq admitted that he dissolved the Majlis to avoid a confidence vote that would have caused his government to fall

remainder of the Majlis elections," he told the court. "What else was left to us but consulting the people in a most democratic method of direct plebiscite?"³⁰

(U) A US Embassy assessment cabled to Washington shortly after the referendum stated that the dissolution of the Majlis "will graphically demonstrate truism of [Mossadeq's] regime that as opposition and discontent have mounted, Mossadeq has moved steadily in authoritarian direction using technique of mobocracy to maintain his hold on power and to eliminate influence Shah." Nonetheless, the Embassy thought Mossadeq's continued appeals to the street could boomerang because he lacked "any real authoritarian organization aside from armed forces." To compensate, according to the Embassy, he would be forced to rely increasingly on the Tudeh, thereby alienating the non-Communist followers of his Government.³¹

(U) Mossadeq Looks for American Support

(U) Mossadeq hoped for US support in his struggle against the British. Like many in the Third World immediately after World War II, he saw the United States as an anti-colonial power. His hopes were not entirely misplaced; the Truman administration saw some merit in his position.

(U) Secretary of State Acheson thought that the British were overly preoccupied with their oil interests and that London did not fully understand the broader Communist threat. He saw Mossadeq as a potentially important part of the solution to the problem of Soviet influence in the Middle East. In Acheson's view, the Iranian Prime Minister would in time become an effective bulwark against Soviet penetration into Iran. To that end, Washington consistently urged London to reach an equitable settlement with Tehran. Acheson apparently was convinced that an agreement would strengthen the Iranian government and promote regional stability.³²

(U) Other considerations, however, complicated the Truman administration's approach. The United States was loath to side publicly with Iran or put excessive pressure on London. Washington needed cooperation and support from Britain—America's closest ally—elsewhere in the world. The war in Korea was not yet over, and the presence of British combat troops was an important symbol of Anglo-American solidarity. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), created in 1949, was still in its formative stages and depended upon British participation as evidence of Western unity

³⁰(U) Ghods, p. 188; Zabih, pp. 112-13. For Kashani's views on the Shari'a, see Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, p. 187.

³¹(U) Department of State Cable from Tehran to Secretary of State, No. 300, 12 August 1953. National Archives and Records Administration Record Group 319, Entry 57, box 27.

³²(U) Acheson criticized "the unusual and persistent stupidity of the [Anglo Iranian Oil] company and the British Government" when it came to Iran. See, Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969), p. 501, quoted in Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 453. Richard W. Cottam, *Iran & the United States: A Cold War Case Study* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), p. 102.

and determination. Vigorous American support for Mossadeq would have complicated American foreign policy in other parts of the world as well.

(U) President Truman had no patience with those refusing to view the Anglo-Iranian problem in a global context. When the US Ambassador to Iran, Henry Grady, wrote to Truman complaining that the White House was not listening to his advice, the President let him know exactly where he stood. "Let me tell you something about the Iranian Situation from this end," he wrote.

(U) [we] held Cabinet meetings on it—we held Security Council meetings on it, and Dean, Bob Lovett, Charlie Sawyer, Harriman and all the senior staff of the Central Intelligence discussed that awful situation with me time and again . . . We tried . . . to get the block headed British to have their oil company make a fair deal with Iran. No, they could not do that. They know all about how to handle it—we didn't according to them.

(U) We had Israel, Egypt, Near East defense, Sudan, South Africa, Tunisia, the NATO treaties all on the fire. *Britain and the Commonwealth Nations were and are absolutely essential if these things are successful.* Then, on top of it all we have Korea and Indo-China. Iran was only one incident. Of course the man on the ground in each one of these places can only see his own problem.³³

³³(U) Farhad Diba, *Mohammad Mossadegh: A Political Biography* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 131-32, citing papers of Henry Grady. Emphasis added.

(U) In February 1921, Persia, as Iran was then known, and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) [the USSR did not exist until December 1922] signed a treaty of friendship. Article VI gave the RSFSR the right to send troops into Persia if a third party tried to use that country as a base from which to attack Soviet Russia. Russian troops would cross the border only if Persia proved incapable of removing the threat itself. In an exchange of explanatory notes in December 1921, the Russians made clear that the treaty applied "only to cases in which preparations have been made for a considerable armed attack upon Russia . . . by the partisans of the regime which has been overthrown [the Tsarist Government] or by its supporters . . ." Leonard Shapiro, ed., *Soviet Treaty Series: A Collection of Bilateral Treaties, Agreements and Conventions, Etc., Concluded Between The Soviet Union and Foreign Powers*, vol. 1, 1917-1928 (Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Press, 1950), pp. 92-94, 150-51.

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(U) Although the documents in CIA's files do not indicate that Smith relayed Langer's concerns to President Truman, he evidently did so because the administration subsequently let London know that the US Government disapproved of *any* military action against Iran. At a British cabinet meeting in September 1951, the government of

(U) Strictly speaking, the USSR could not have invoked Article VI if a small British force occupied Abadan in 1951. Abadan is far from the Soviet-Iranian border and the few troops the British contemplated sending could not have made a "considerable armed attack" upon Soviet forces. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the USSR would have found some pretext to occupy northern Iran had Stalin desired.

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Prime Minister Clement Attlee decided that it "could not afford to break with the United States on an issue of this kind."³⁹ A potential military crisis had passed.

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³⁹(U) H.W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War: Loy Henderson and the Rise of the American Empire, 1918-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 234.

⁴⁰(U) Henry A. Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs; John D. Jernegan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs; Charles E. Bohlen, Counselor of the Department of State and member of the Senior Staff, National Security Council; Robert P. Joyce, Policy Planning Staff, Department of State.

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It had no roots and would "pass and its leaders fall as soon as it is demonstrated that their policies have brought Iran to the brink of ruin."⁴⁸

(U) More specifically, American officials feared that a British failure to compromise with Mossadeq would enable him to whip up Iran's virulent nationalism further, with potentially disastrous results. The West might well lose so much of its influence that it could not stop Tehran from moving the Soviet orbit. Or the Iranian political situation could simply descend into chaos, in which case the Soviet-backed Tudeh—Iran's best organized, best financed, and most effective political organization—would be ready to fill the vacuum. In the State Department's view, such developments would jeopardize the security and stability of the entire Middle East, would serve notice that the West could not preserve the independence of important Third World states, and could deprive the West not only of Iran's oil but ultimately that of its Arab neighbors as well.⁴⁹

(U) In contrast, the British regarded Iran as basically a conservative country that would not seek Soviet help nor collapse internally if London held out for the kind of oil settlement it wanted. The British also feared that a "bad" settlement (one not on their terms) would severely diminish their global political and economic power, already starting to decline with the post-World War II emergence of independence movements in much of the British empire.⁵⁰

(U) The only suggestion for resolving these differences offered in the State Department's internal memorandum further consultation to determine the "political, military, economic, and psychological effects of the loss of Iran to the west as balanced against the political and economic effects of an agreement with the Iranians on the oil situation which might prejudice other concessions elsewhere and diminish British prestige throughout the world." The memorandum concluded that unless the US and United Kingdom agreed on the importance to the West of an independent Iran, there was little chance the two would be able to forge a common policy.⁵¹

(U) Eleven months later the National Security Council set forth basic US policy toward Iran. NSC 136/1 emphasized that the United States was committed to preventing Iran from falling under communist control and that Iran's strategic position, its oil, and its vulnerability to Soviet political subversion or military attack made it a tempting target for Soviet expansion. If the Tudeh Party seized or attempted to seize control of the Iranian government, the document argued, the United States should, in conjunction with the British, be ready to support a non-communist Iranian government militarily, economically, diplomatically, and psychologically.⁵²

⁴⁸(U) Ibid.

⁴⁹(U) Ibid. The State Department memorandum noted that American influence was waning daily as more and more Iranians identified the United States with British interests. The State Department assessed British influence as negligible.

⁵⁰(U) Ibid.

⁵¹(U) Ibid.

⁵²(U) United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-1954*, Vol. X, *Iran 1951-1954* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1989), pp. 529-34.

(U) American Policy Turns Against Mossadeq

(U) Dwight Eisenhower did not immediately turn his attention to Iran after taking the oath of office in January 1953. His campaign pledge to end the Korean war had priority, and only weeks after the inaugural festivities Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin died. The new administration was faced with reevaluating Soviet-American relations. Under these circumstances, events in Iran receded into the foreign policy background—temporarily.⁵³

(U) The British had never given up hope of executing a covert action to remove Mossadeq, and continued to test the American response. After Mossadeq severed diplomatic relations with Britain in October 1952, the indefatigable Woodhouse met in London with Foreign Office officials, including Anthony Eden, to consider options available to Britain. According to Woodhouse, Eden said that no covert operation would succeed unless it had American support. Woodhouse “took his words as tantamount to permission to pursue the idea further with the Americans, particularly with the CIA.” This he did, arriving in Washington in mid-November 1952 after Dwight Eisenhower’s victory.⁵⁴

⁵³(U) Brands, p. 272.

⁵⁴ (U) Woodhouse, pp. 116-17.

⁵⁵ (U) Ibid., p. 119.

(U) President Truman's and Secretary Acheson's policy of encouraging the parties to reach an equitable oil settlement had reached a dead end. Neither the British nor Mossadeq appeared willing to back off from their publicly stated positions, which each by this time held with something approaching religious fervor. To London's relief, the new US administration abandoned the search for a negotiated end to the crisis. Perhaps now, the British hoped, Washington would finally begin to see Mossadeq as the demagogue London thought he was and take appropriate action.

(U) Also in March 1953, State Department officials and British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden met to discuss the Iranian situation. Eden found the Americans much more receptive to the British viewpoint than they had been under Truman and Acheson. The collapse of the Anglo-Iranian oil negotiations had changed the Americans' attitude; Washington now considered Mossadeq a source of *instability* and feared that his continued tenure invited a Tudeh coup.

(U) The United States suspected the Soviets of trying to take advantage of the deteriorating situation in Iran. In the US view, Soviet leaders undoubtedly saw Mossadeq's troubles as a diplomatic opening, and if he wanted to try to play Moscow against Washington, the Soviets would let him. The Kremlin would help him.

potential benefits to the Soviets of cultivating Mossadeq were great: a docile southern neighbor at a minimum, and beyond that, a chance to draw a strategically important country into the Soviet sphere of influence.

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(C) The Iran-Soviet negotiations were never held. On the day he met with Jernegan, Saleh could not know that the Mossadeq government would remain in power

only eight more days. President Eisenhower apparently had already made the decision to oust the Iranian Prime Minister.

(U) Mossadeq's Successor: Ayatollah Kashani or Fazlollah Zahedi?

(U) At this point, there was no consensus on who should replace Mossadeq. US officials briefly considered backing Ayatollah Kashani, the former Mossadeq ally, who had a large following and had become a strident opponent of the Prime Minister.

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(U) Opinion gradually settled on General Fazlollah Zahedi as Mossadeq's successor. Zahedi had served as an irregular soldier under the Shah's father, Reza Shah, in 1915 and subsequently rose through the ranks of the Iranian Army. In 1942 the British arrested him for his activities under Nazi agent Franz Mayer and deported him to Palestine. Zahedi worked for the Germans because of his anti-British views; he was not generally thought to be pro-Nazi. The British released him on VE Day in 1945. Zahedi retired from the army in 1949 and subsequently served in a series of mostly honorary posts. He was Minister of the Interior in the early 1950.

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Iranians on the public scene [not] noted for honesty, consistency, reliability and strength of convictions."⁶³

(U) The State Department recognized that he was not the ideal candidate, but was qualified because he seemed "friendly to the United States and Britain and would be acceptable to both Governments."⁶⁴ Even more importantly, he was willing to take the job.

(U) Whoever succeeded Mossadeq would be able to count on US support. In March 1953, an internal memorandum by the State Department's Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs outlined the steps the United States was likely to take if Mossadeq fell. Although American officials would limit their public pronouncements to expressions of unwillingness to interfere in the internal affairs of another country, privately they would use non-US channels to assure the Shah and new prime minister that Washington was eager to help. Sensitivity to Iranian concerns that the country was being turned into a foreign base would preclude ostentatious and immediate American military assistance, but privately the Americans could assure Tehran that meaningful military aid (trucks, communication equipment, and other items that also had civilian uses) would be forthcoming.⁶⁶

(U) Eisenhower Turns to CIA

(U) President Eisenhower had several options for implementing Mossadeq's removal. He could use military force to invade Iran, but that was impractical for obvious reasons. He could keep hoping that a diplomatic solution would appear. That option too was not viable; diplomacy had already failed and the political situation in Iran was worsening daily. Finally, he could turn to CIA for a covert political operation; the National Security Council had decided that covert action was a legitimate instrument of US policy.⁶⁷ This alternative held the promise of attaining the result the administration

⁶⁶(U) "Measures Which the United States Government Might Take in Support of a Successor Government to Mosadeq," March 1953, Department of State, Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Issues, RG 59, Lot 57, D 529, Box 40, National Archives and Records Administration.

⁶⁷(U) In NSC 10/2.

wanted with a minimum of cost and attention. If such an operation went sour, Washington could disavow any knowledge or connection.

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(U) Available documents do not indicate who authorized CIA to begin planning the operation, but it almost certainly was President Eisenhower himself. Eisenhower biographer Stephen Ambrose has written that the absence of documentation reflected the President's style:

(U) Before going into the operation, Ajax had to have the approval of the President. Eisenhower participated in none of the meetings that set up Ajax; he received only oral reports on the plan; and he did not discuss it with his Cabinet or the NSC. Establishing a pattern he would hold to throughout his Presidency, he kept his distance and left no documents behind that could implicate the President in any projected coup. But in the privacy of the Oval Office, over cocktails, he was kept informed by Foster Dulles, and he maintained a tight control over the activities of the CIA.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹(U) Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, vol. 2, *The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 111. Ambrose repeats this paragraph verbatim in *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 333.

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Chapter 32

(U) Planning the Operation

(U) —Kermit “Kim” Roosevelt, grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, was the chief of NEA Division, headed the Division:

——— A 1938 Harvard graduate, Roosevelt had embarked on a scholarly career teaching government to undergraduates—first at Harvard and then at the California Institute of Technology. He joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II and worked for the chief of the organization's Secret Intelligence Branch in the Near East. After the war he compiled the official OSS war report and then returned to the Middle East as a writer for the Saturday Evening Post.² In 1947 he published Arabs, Oil, and History: The Story of the Middle East.³ C.M. Woodhouse of MI5 wrote in his memoirs that Roosevelt “had a natural inclination for bold and imaginative action, and also a friendly sympathy with the British.”⁴

¹ (U) The name went through several permutations before settling on Near East and Africa Division.

² (U) Burton Hersch, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), p. 331; G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), p. 458; *Who's Who, 1964-65.*

³ (U) Kermit Roosevelt, *Arabs, Oil, and History: The Story of the Middle East* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press [1947] 1969).

⁴ C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada, 1982), p. 120.

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⁹(U) Although CIA almost certainly would have hired him as a permanent staff employee, Wilber refused and preferred to work under contract. He lived in Princeton and did not wish to leave. A contract enabled him to work at CIA without requiring him to move to Washington. Wilber continued his contract relationship with CIA until the 1960s.

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(U) The Americans Review the Preliminary Plan
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(U) According to the military attachés, it was important to recognize the difference between allegiance and control. The Shah enjoyed the allegiance of almost all Iranian Army officers; they had been raised to regard their monarch as a symbol of loyalty and patriotism. Whether he wielded any "control" was more problematic. His failure to assert himself against Mossadeq was causing confusion and consternation as officers risked their careers by backing him against the Prime Minister. The attachés concluded that "if the Shah were to give the word, probably more than 99% of the officers would

22 (U) M 115 from USARMA Tehran to Department of the Army, Department of the Air Force, Department of the Navy, "Control of the Armed Forces of Iran," 11 August 1953, National Archives, RG 319, Entry 57, box 27. The distribution list shows that CIA received nine copies of the attachés' assessment.

comply with his orders with a sense of relief and with the hope of attaining a state of stability.'²⁸

(U) Mossadeq, through Army Chief of Staff General Riahi, a Mossadeq loyalist, actually controlled the Army. Iranian officers considered legal—and would obey—any order of the Shah coming from the Chief of Staff. The officer corps considered the Shah's silence about the Chief of Staff's actions as implied consent. Failure to follow orders even under these conditions was tantamount to treason. The American military attachés concluded that if the Shah opposed the Chief of Staff, or if the Chief of Staff with the Shah's support opposed the Prime Minister, Mossadeq's control of the Army would evaporate.²⁹

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²⁸(U) Ibid.

²⁹(U) Ibid.

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(U) The First Phase: Convincing the Shah

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³⁴(U) Schwarzkopf was the father of the American general of the same name who led US and Coalition forces in the 1991 Gulf war against Iraq.

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⁴⁵(U) Donald N. Wilber, *Adventures in the Middle East: Excursions and Incursions* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1986) , p. 189.

⁴⁶(U) The Shari'a is Islamic religious law, intended to guide all aspects of social activity. See, William O. Beeman, "Patterns of Religion and Economic Development in Iran from the Qajar Era to the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79," in *Global Economics and Religion*, ed. James Finn (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 78.

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27(U) H.W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War: Loy Henderson and the Rise of the American Empire 1918-61* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 282.

(U) Final Approval

On 25 June 1953, senior foreign policymaking officials met at the State Department to hear Roosevelt outline the final plan for TPAJAX. President Eisenhower did not attend, but other top officials did: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles; Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson; DCI Allen Dulles; Undersecretary of State and former DCI Walter Bedell Smith; Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert Murphy; Robert Bowie, head of the State Department's policy planning staff (and subsequent CIA Deputy Director of Intelligence in the late 1970s); Henry Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East; and US Ambassador to Iran Loy Henderson.⁶¹

(U) After Roosevelt's briefing, Secretary of State Dulles polled the meeting. Allen Dulles and Walter Bedell Smith were strongly in favor of proceeding; the others agreed but were less enthusiastic. Henderson did not like covert operations but thought the United States had no choice in this case.⁶²

(U) Nor did CIA have to notify Congress of its impending operation. Allen Dulles may have informally told key Senators like Richard Russell, as well as key members of the House of Representatives, what the Agency was doing, but CIA's files contain no record of these conversations.

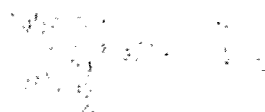
⁶¹(U) Brands, p. 281. Eisenhower's absence should not be read as passivity or disinterest. The President knew what was going on but preferred to keep himself out of all formal deliberations. His orders and briefings were given orally with no record kept.

⁶⁴(U) In December 1974 the Hughes-Ryan Amendment required a Presidential "finding" for each covert action, and President Gerald Ford's Executive Order 11095 (16 February 1976) required that the Executive Office notify Congress of all Presidential findings.

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Chapter 3

(U) Execution and Initial Failure

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^b(U) The absence of relevant intelligence in Carroll's file is curious. Foreign intelligence assets, not covert action assets, collect the sorts of information Carroll needed. Two possible reasons explain the paucity of information. Either the foreign intelligence assets had not been tasked properly, or, as is more likely, their focus up to this time had been on the Soviet Union and its activities rather than on Iranian activities. The USSR invariably was the main target of the American intelligence effort, and most if not all of CIA's foreign intelligence assets in Tehran were almost certainly trying to collect information on the Soviets.



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(U) Securing the *Firmans*

(U) The first phase of the operation began on 15 July 1953, when Asadollah Rashidian went to the French Riviera to meet Princess Ashraf. He explained to her that Mossadeq posed a continuing danger for Iran and that she should convince her brother to dismiss him. She was unenthusiastic.

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(U) The Princess also was convinced that Mossadeq would do whatever he could to prevent her return. She had already written to the Prime Minister three times, saying that she wanted to come back to Iran because she could no longer afford to live in Europe. When she saw, with some prompting, that a surreptitious visit to the Shah might improve her chances of returning home permanently, she began to warm to the idea.

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(U) Princess Ashraf arrived in Tehran on 25 July 1953 and met with her brother four days later. She was unable to convince him to sign the *firman*s and left Tehran the following day.

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²³(U) The arrival of Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Lavrentiev in Tehran on 1 August 1953 probably heightened Washington's and Roosevelt's sense of urgency. Lavrentiev had been ambassador to Czechoslovakia in 1948 and had been behind the Communist coup that deposed pro-Western Czech President Benes. Lavrentiev replaced Ivan Sadchikov, who left Tehran for Moscow in July 1953.

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(U) Manucher Farmanfarmaian, a member of the Iranian nobility, was present when Nassiri brought the documents to the Shah and relates in his memoirs the circumstances of this historic event. One afternoon the Shah was relaxing outside with a circle of friends. A butler approached and whispered into the Shah's ear, and the Shah replied loudly, "Tell him to come in." A man in a dark suit whom Farmanfarmaian did not recognize appeared from behind some trees and, after a few words with the Shah, presented him with a document. The Shah asked if anyone had a pen; Farmanfarmaian offered his. After signing the document, the Shah noted that the pen would be worth much more now that he'd used it to sign the paper. "A fortune?" Farmanfarmaian joked. "Perhaps," the monarch replied. "Perhaps it will bring us all luck as well." Farmanfarmaian writes that he "found out later that the messenger had been sent by Kermit Roosevelt and the document the Shah had signed appointed General Zahedi prime minister."²⁸

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²⁶(U) Nassiri later became the head of SAVAK. In 1978, former Agency officer Miles Copeland met General Nassiri to discuss Ayatollah Khomeini and the deteriorating situation in Iran. Copeland found Nassiri "even stupider than Kim [Roosevelt] said he'd be." The General regaled Copeland with "fairly bloodthirsty details of how he could have put an end to the demonstrations within a week if only the Shah had given him free rein." Miles Copeland, *The Game Player: Confessions of the CIA's original political operative* (London: Aurum Press, 1989), p. 251.

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²⁸ (U) Manucher Farmanfarmaian and Roxane Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: Memoirs of a Persian Prince* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 292. Farmanfarmaian says that the Shah signed the *firman* on a Sunday in the second week of August. This cannot be correct, for the *firman* was not signed until 13 August. The second Sunday in August was the ninth, and the third Sunday was the sixteenth.

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³⁰(U) Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 171.

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³³(U) Ibid. (S). Wisner's idea of the "public" probably was narrow. Most Americans did not read *The New York Times* and could not have told him whether Iran was in the Middle East, South America, or North Carolina.

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(U) The original plan for a military operation had failed abysmally. Upon hearing of Nassiri's arrest, the principal anti-Mossadeq figures lost their courage. For example, General Batmangelich, who was to have captured Riahi's headquarters, turned back when he saw the troops surrounding the building. Batmangelich and Col. Akhavi soon found themselves under arrest. The Shah, for his part, left the summer palace in the suburbs of Tehran and flew to Baghdad via Ramsar.

³⁹In his memoirs, the Shah said:

However, following a pre-arranged plan, the Queen and I had left Tehran before learning of the revolution's success. It had been decided weeks before that if Mossadegh should use force to resist his deposition, we would temporarily leave the country. I had decided upon this move because I believed that it would force Mossadegh and his henchmen to show their real allegiances, and that thereby it would help crystallize Persian public opinion.

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961), p. 104.

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(U) Ambassador Henderson, who had left Iran to distance himself from the operation, returned to Tehran on 16 August. He immediately sought and received an audience with Mossadeq. The ambassador asked the Prime Minister if he believed the Shah had issued orders dismissing him and appointing Zahedi. Mossadeq replied that he had never seen such documents, that he would not believe them if he saw them, and that in any event the Shah was powerless to dismiss him. According to Mossadeq, the Shah could not, on his own authority, demand a change in the government. Notwithstanding the Iranian constitution's provision that the prime minister serves at the pleasure of the monarch, Mossadeq contended that his power came from the people rather than the Shah.⁴²

(U) At noon on Sunday 16 August, Mossadeq issued a brief statement over Radio Tehran: "According to the will of the people, expressed by referendum, the 17th Majlis is dissolved. Elections for the 18th session will be held soon." Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoseyn Fatemi held a press conference that afternoon in which he reviewed the events of the coup and announced that the Acting Minister of Court Abul Ghassem Amini had been

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⁴²(U) H.W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War: Loy Henderson and the Rise of the American Empire 1918-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 235, 285.

arrested.⁴³ Fatemi made several violent speeches virulently attacking the Shah and ordered the monarch's statues in Tehran torn down.⁴⁴

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Chapter 4

(U) Victory

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(U) Sunday 16 August: Roosevelt and the Station Regroup

(U) Roosevelt knew he held at least two powerful cards in the Shah's *firmans*. Although Zahedi was hiding from Mossadeq, under the Iranian Constitution he was the legal Prime Minister of Iran and Mossadeq was not. Roosevelt was convinced that if he could publicize and emphasize that theme, Mossadeq could not retain his illegal grip on power for long.

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¹(U) Love covered the entire crisis for *The New York Times*. His reports made the front pages of the newspaper from 17-24 August 1953.

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(U) TEXT BOX: "A Terrible, Terrible Coincidence" in Rome

(U) When the Shah arrived in Rome on 18 August, CIA faced a potential disaster. By coincidence, DCI Allen Dulles was there on vacation. When the Shah checked into the Excelsior Hotel, Dulles was standing next to him trying to do the same thing.

(U) John Waller remembers that he got a call from Frank Wisner between 0200 and 0300. Wisner was agitated. "He's gone to Rome," Wisner told Waller. "A terrible, terrible coincidence occurred. Can you guess what it is?" Waller could not.

(U) "Well," Wisner continued, "he went to the Excelsior Hotel to book a room with his bride, and the pilot, there were only three of them, and he was crossing the street on his way into the hotel. Guess, . . . can you tell me, I don't want to say it over the phone, can you imagine what may have happened? Think of the worst thing you can think of that happened."

(U) Waller said, "He was hit by a cab and killed."

(U) "No, no, no, no," Wisner responded impatiently, by this time almost wild with excitement. "Well, John, maybe you don't know, that Dulles had decided to extend his vacation by going to Rome. Now can you imagine what happened?"

(U) Waller answered, "Dulles hit him with his car and killed him."

(U) Wisner did not think it was funny. "They both showed up at the reception desk at the Excelsior at the very same moment. And Dulles had to say, 'After you, your Majesty.'"²⁵

(U) The meeting between Dulles and the Shah was completely fortuitous but fraught with embarrassment for the US Government and CIA had the news media learned of it. They did not, so the incident passed unnoticed. Wisner's reaction strongly suggests that the meeting was coincidental. It was unlikely that he would have called Waller at 0200 in a panic and revealed sensitive information over an open telephone line if there had been a plan for the DCI to meet the Shah in Rome.²⁶

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²⁶(U) In writing of this incident in *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles*, Peter Grose says that "Of all the conspiracy theories that later swirled around the personage of Allen Dulles, none has made a convincing case to accommodate this unfortunate proximity." Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: the Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p. 367.

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(U) At this point, members of Iranian *Zuhrkhaneh* (exercise clubs)—weightlifters, wrestlers, and acrobats—appeared at the head of the crowd. Their involvement was almost certainly the work of the Rashidian brothers and was a brilliant stroke that showed a profound understanding of Iranian psychology.

(U) Iranians idolize acrobats and weightlifters in the same way that many Americans idolize baseball, basketball, or football players. The sight of these men tumbling or exercising in unison with dumbbells drew a crowd in an astonishingly short time. Moreover, the country's most famous athlete, Shaban "Bi Mohk" (Shaban "the Brainless") Jaffari, was in the lead and began chanting pro-Shah slogans. The effect was electrifying. 36

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(U) The swelling crowd headed for the offices of the pro-Mossadeq and anti-American newspaper, *Bakhtar Emruz*. Security forces watched passively as the crowd demolished the newspaper's office. By 1000 the crowd was headed for Mossadeq's residence at 109 Kakh (Palace) Street, which was ringed with tanks and troops loyal to the Prime Minister.

(U) The troops guarding the residence were unsure of what was happening. When confronted with the large, angry crowd, some of the soldiers opened fire. The fighting escalated as pro-Shah troops returned fire. Mossadeq climbed over the wall surrounding his house and escaped.

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(U) The size and fervor of the demonstrations were critical in encouraging the military to come down on the side of the Shah and Prime Minister Zahedi. Although some members of the officer corps opposed Mossadeq, Roosevelt could not be certain that their units would follow their orders in the absence of evidence that the general population would back them up. The Iranian army has a long tradition of waiting to see who controls the streets before it acts.

³⁸(S) Ibid., pp. 10.

³⁹(S) Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁰(S) Ibid., p. 12.

(U) The broadcast in the afternoon of 19 August was confused and chaotic, but there was no doubt that pro-Shah forces had captured and were controlling Radio Tehran. The first indication came when the announcer said, "The people of Tehran have risen today and occupied all the government offices, and I am able to talk to you all through the help of the armed forces. The government of Mossadeq is a government of rebellion and has fallen."⁴¹ Seven minutes later, amid much confusion and shouting on the air, a Col. Ali Pahlavon said,

(U) Oh people of the cities, be wide awake. The government of Mossadeq has been defeated. My dear compatriots, listen! I am one of the soldiers and one of the devotees of this country. Oh officers, a number of traitors, like Hoseyn Fatemi, wants to sell out the country to the foreigners.

(U) My dear compatriots, today the Iranian royalists have defeated the demagogue government by which Fatemi was ruling. The Iranian nation, officers, army, and the police have taken the situation in their hands.

(U) Premier Zahedi will assume his post. There is no place for anxiety. Keep tranquil.⁴²

(U) The broadcast stopped. After seven minutes it continued with a woman shouting,

(U) Oh people of Iran, let the Iranian nation prove that the foreigners cannot capture this country! Iranians love the King. Oh tribes of Iran, Mossadeq is ruling over your country without your knowledge, sending your country to the government of the hammer and sickle.⁴³

(U) A major from the Iranian army said that he was an infantry officer "retired by Mossadeq, the traitor. We proved to the world that the Iranian army is the protector of this country and is under the command of the Shah." Much confusion followed, after which Radio Tehran played the national anthem and then went off the air.⁴⁴

⁴¹(U) Intercept from Tehran Iranian Home Service, 19 August 1953, 1200 GMT, Records of the Directorate of Operations, Job 79-01228A, Box 11, Folder 14, ARC

⁴²(U) Intercept from Tehran Iranian Home Service, 19 August 1953, 1207 GMT, Records of the Directorate of Operations, Job 79-01228A, Box 11, Folder 14, ARC.

⁴³(U) Intercept from Tehran Iranian Home Service, 19 August 1953, 1214 GMT, Records of the Directorate of Operations, Job 79-01228A, Box 11, Folder 14, ARC.

⁴⁴(U) Ibid. Radio Tehran went off the air at 1222 GMT.

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(U) Zahedi began broadcasting that he was the legally appointed head of the government.⁴⁸ He also promised, to Roosevelt's chagrin, that he would boost living standards, provide free health services to the poor, and modernize agriculture.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ (U) According to the State Department, the Embassy monitor reported Zahedi's transmission as follows:

Dear Compatriots:

In the name of Almighty, I address you.

I have been appointed your Prime Minister by order of His Majesty. Past governments have made many promises but have achieved very little. Nation must know I am lawful Prime Minister on Shah's orders. Principal points my program are: Rule of law; raising standard of living; free health services for all; mechanization of agriculture; road construction; public security; individual and social freedom; cooperative societies.

Long live Mohamed Reza Shah Pahlevi.

Telegram from US Embassy Tehran to Secretary of State, No. 406, 19 August 1953. National Archives, RG 319, Entry 57, box 27.

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(U) General Zahedi half-entered the plane and kissed the Shah's knee, then backed from the door to allow the 34-year-old Emperor to descend. The Shah wore the gold-braided blue gray uniform of the Air Force Commander in Chief that had been specially flown to Baghdad for his return. His eyes were moist and his mouth was set in an effort to control his emotions.⁵⁸

The Mossadeq era was over.⁵⁹

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Chapter 5

(U) Aftermath

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(U) The different and widely separated home garrisons of the battalions made them unlikely co-conspirators against the new regime. The chance that any of these battalions would refuse to follow Zahedi's orders was remote.

(U) The five brigades in the Tehran garrison had not covered themselves with glory during the civil unrest ousting Mossadeq, and Batmangelich and Zahedi no doubt thought it prudent to have other troops in the capital who probably would not hesitate to crush a Tudeh-led coup attempt. Batmangelich clearly intended these forces for more than ceremonial purposes; troops do not parade or pass in review with live ammunition.

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(U) Byroade noted that a revolution of nationalism was sweeping Asia and that any effective leader had to base his program on nationalist aspirations or face political suicide. Zahedi, therefore, was not likely to reverse many of Mossadeq's policies. Byroade warned that American policymakers would be unwise to assume "Iran will turn a new face toward the West in the immediate future." Nonetheless, he argued, Zahedi merited American support. His fall, in Byroade's opinion, would "open the way to chaos and a struggle for power in which only the Tudeh organization would be likely to win."²

(U) Two complications affected American support for the new Iranian Prime Minister. Zahedi lacked solid political support in his own right. He could expect the Shah to thwart his efforts to create a strong government, since the Shah distrusted *any* strong leader—or anyone who might emerge as a strong leader.

(U) Zahedi's options were limited. He could not become a military dictator as long as the military remained loyal to the Shah, nor could he seek broad-based civilian support without calling for new Majlis elections. The Majlis was notorious, in Byroade's words, for its "destructive criticism" and there was no guarantee that a new Majlis would cooperate with Zahedi. In short, Byroade wrote, "there is no cause for jubilation that our problems are ended in Iran. On the contrary, the future can be expected to bear remarkable similarity to the recent past."³ It was a sobering antidote to the euphoria at the highest levels of CIA.

¹(U) Memorandum from [Henry A.] Byroade, NEA, to Mr. Bowie, S/P, "Iran," 21 August 1953, RG 59, Records of the State Department, Records of the Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs, Lot 57, D 529, Box 40, NARA.

²(U) Ibid.

³(U) Ibid.

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18(U) Ibid.

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(U) Until the archives of the former Soviet Union are fully opened, it will be impossible for scholars to know the exact reasons why the Tudeh did not act. Perhaps Bahrami was right in suggesting that it was only because the Tudeh was unprepared, but the reasons are probably more complex. Stalin had been dead for only five months, and the new leaders were probably reassessing his policies. They almost certainly recognized the importance of Iran to the United States (and to the Soviet Union) but may have been unsure how much freedom of action they had. In any event, since the Tudeh was so closely directed from Moscow, it is unlikely that the Iranian Communists decided on their own to do nothing

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(U) Whatever ill effects or career damage Lavrentiev suffered from Mossadeq's fall were temporary. He eventually returned to his post in Tehran and stayed until May 1955, when Moscow recalled him to participate in a commission trying to resolve outstanding Soviet-Iranian border and financial disputes.

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(U) Secretary of State Dulles did not heed Roosevelt's admonition. The Secretary was already contemplating a similar operation in a country half a world away from Iran and much closer to home.³⁰ Officials in CIA's Directorate of Plans had been working since 1952 on schemes to depose Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz. Like Mossadeq, Arbenz was willing to turn a blind eye to Communist machinations in his country. Unlike Mossadeq, however, Arbenz appeared to be a Communist sympathizer. Even the most bitter anti-Mossadeq partisans did not claim the Iranian Prime Minister was a Communist or a sympathizer []

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(U) Robert Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 210.

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(U) Roosevelt's knowledge of the Middle East gave him the confidence to play the situation in Iran by ear without much Headquarters involvement. His lack of Latin American expertise would have precluded a similar approach in dealing with Guatemala. Control from Headquarters would necessarily have been tighter, restricting his freedom of movement. [.]]

(U) There was another important distinction between Iran and Guatemala. Arbenz controlled a comparatively stable Guatemalan Government; Mossadeq presided over a shambles. At the start of 1953, according to Iranian specialist Kuross A. Samii, "Iran resembled an old ship swept away by a storm with no one aboard capable of dealing with

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the attendant frenzy." By August, Mossadeq "was barely holding on to the broken sails of his sinking ship. Everything considered, whatever might be said of the morality or the legality of American action, it still should not be characterized as having overthrown a stable regime in Iran."³⁵ What worked in Iran, Roosevelt sensed, probably would not work in Guatemala because the circumstances were so different.

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³⁵(U) Kuross A. Samii, *Involvement By Invitation: American Strategies of Containment in Iran* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 143.

³⁶(U) Roosevelt, *Countercoup*, p. 210.

Chapter 6

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(U) During the 1979-81 Iranian hostage crisis, a reporter asked President Jimmy Carter whether he thought that “it was proper for the United States to restore the Shah to the throne in 1953 against the popular will within Iran.” Instead of correcting the reporter’s loaded question, the President replied, “That’s ancient history, and I don’t think it’s appropriate or helpful for me to go into the propriety of something that happened 30 years ago.”¹

(U) Many diplomatic historians, intelligence historians, and political scientists do not consider TPAJAX “ancient history.” Eighteen years after President Carter’s remark, the questions implicit in the reporter’s query persist and continue to stir controversy.

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¹(U) President Jimmy Carter, “The President’s News Conference of February 13, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter*. Book I—January 1 to May 23, 1980 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 307.

policy of the Zahedi Government that the United States obtained at minimal cost² would last for 26 years. Secure in the knowledge that the US would support Iran against the USSR, the Shah was able to turn his attention to domestic matters. He began a series of far-reaching modernization efforts, including land reform and steps toward the emancipation of women.

(U) TPAJAX came at a time when the events in pre-war Europe were a fresh memory. Americans had seen how Nazi subversion could destroy a country like Czechoslovakia. They had seen the consequences of weakness and appeasement before Nazi and Japanese demands. They had suffered the incalculable cost of failing to act when action might have stopped further aggression. Many were determined never again to let the appearance of weakness and indecision encourage aggression.

(U) Neither the White House nor State Department had the slightest doubt that the Soviets coveted Iran and would do whatever they could, short of war, to bring that country within the Soviet orbit. The Azeri crisis of 1947 showed that unless checked, Stalin would continue to test the West's resolve.

(U) Stalin's death in March 1953 added a dangerous element of ambiguity to Soviet intentions. Who would succeed the late dictator, the "breaker of nations"?³ Would Soviet policy become more or less aggressive? Would the Soviets reoccupy Iranian Azerbaijan? Would they encourage the Tudeh to topple Mossadeq? The White House, the State Department, and CIA struggled to find answers to these questions.

(U) Sending American troops to Iran was never a practical option for logistical and political reasons. An American military occupation almost certainly would have led to war. The USSR would have invoked the terms of the 1921 Treaty of Friendship Between Iran and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic and occupied the northern part of the country. Iran would have been divided into a Communist north and a free south. Fear of partition lay behind Washington's objection to the proposed British occupation of the port city of Abadan early in the oil nationalization crisis.

(U) A covert political operation promised to attain American foreign policy and strategic objectives in Iran without the threat of war. CIA gave the Eisenhower administration flexibility where diplomacy had failed and military action was not practical. In addition, CIA gave the US Government "plausible deniability." If a covert action went awry, the President could deny American involvement. With these considerations in mind, and given the widely held Western outlook on the international

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²(U) HISTORIAN ROBERT CONQUEST'S term. See, Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking Press, 1991).

situation in general and on Soviet intentions in particular, the Eisenhower administration's decision to act in Iran was reasonable and understandable.

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(U) A kind of historical hubris results from the belief that because we know far more about the consequences of past acts than contemporaneous actors could know, we are more likely than they are to have a correct interpretation of events and of cause and effect. We cannot know the consequences of decisions not made or actions not taken any more than contemporaries did. Nevertheless, time and knowledge of past events provide the historian with a perspective not available to contemporaries.

(U) Some historians argue today that TPAJAX was not in the US national interest.⁴ Maintaining that American policymakers in the 1950s defined national security narrowly, these historians emphasize that actions intended to enhance American power ultimately have the opposite effect if they violate democratic ideals. In this view, intervening in domestic political processes in foreign countries inevitably undermines US national security by weakening the values on which US security rests in the long run.

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(U) This critique deserves careful attention; its more thoughtful and articulate proponents appear to make a persuasive case. The Shah *did* leave Tehran, to return only when he was certain Mossadeq was gone and American support for the Peacock Throne assured. Mossadeq *was* popular among some segments of the population. Some Iranians *were* disillusioned with the United States. They had hoped that the US, as the great postwar anti-colonial power, would not intrigue against their country as the British and Russians had done. A close examination of the facts, however, reveals flaws in the revisionist critique.

⁴ See, e.g., Wilbur Crane Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980); Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁵(U) C.M. Woodhouse, one of the British principals in the operation, deals with this point in his autobiography *Something Ventured*. He contends that what Britain and the United States saw in 1953 was vastly different from what happened in 1979. The proper analogy, he asserts, is to the events in Afghanistan from 1973 to 1980: the overthrow of a weak monarchy by nationalist forces, who in turn would be overtaken by indigenous Communists, who in turn would call in the Soviet Army. C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada, 1982), p. 131.

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(U) Although there is no doubt that Mossadeq captured the imagination of segments of Iranian society with the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, his political support dwindled steadily. By August 1953 he did not command mass support. The Tudeh and splinters of the National Front were the only political parties willing to support him.

(U) The pro-Shah sentiments of the Tehran crowds on 19 August 1953 were genuine. Although CIA had a hand in starting the demonstrations, they swelled spontaneously and took on a life of their own that surprised even Kermit Roosevelt. Many average Iranians seemed convinced that they had to choose between the Shah and Communism. In marching against the Tudeh, Iranians were supporting the Shah. Iran expert Donald Wilber's plan to make this choice explicit had worked.

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(U) Before dismissing reports like those from Khorramabad as propaganda, it must be remembered that CIA was able to influence directly events only in the capital city, and there only barely. Kermit Roosevelt had neither the money nor the agents to initiate the kinds of demonstrations that took place in Iran's widely separated cities.

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(U) American University's Amos Perlmutter belongs to the school of thought that considers Mossadeq's fall inevitable regardless of Western actions. In a foreword to Zabih's *The Mossadegh Era: Roots of the Iranian Revolution* Perlmutter writes that CIA's "role in these climactic events was not very significant, despite some of the heavily unsubstantiated claims of the old boys such as Kermit Roosevelt."

(U) To a large extent, the return of the Shah and the downfall of Mossadeq were made possible by divisions among the political forces of the left and right, the left split among nationalists, Marxists and Communists and the right split among the reactionary and xenophobic clergymen and their more liberal counterparts.⁸

(U) Perlmutter is correct in saying that Iranian political divisions made the fall of Mossadeq possible, but merely because something is possible does not ensure that it will happen. CIA's role was significant. Without Kermit Roosevelt's leadership, guidance, and ability to put some backbone into the key players when they wanted to quit, no one would have moved against Mossadeq. Iran had many political factions but few legitimate leaders—and even fewer leaders with the discipline and will necessary to take risks.

(U) A key difference between Mossadeq and his domestic opponents was his ability to control the streets. Although much of the National Front had deserted the Prime Minister, the Tudeh, by this time Iran's only disciplined political party, rallied to him when its aims and Mossadeq's coincided. Tudeh demonstrations intimidated the opposition and kept the army on the sidelines. Mossadeq's opponents would have been unable to overcome these disadvantages without outside help.

(U) The notion that Mossadeq would have fallen anyway ignores the realities of Iranian politics. No group was able, without help, to contest control of the streets of Tehran with the Tudeh. The opposition needed a rallying point and a psychological trigger. Roosevelt provided both and gave Tehranians a choice between the Shah and the

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⁷(U) Sepehr Zabih, *The Mossadegh Era: Roots of the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1982), p. 126.

⁸(U) Amos Perlmutter, forward to *The Mossadegh Era: Roots of the Iranian Revolution* by Sepehr Zabih (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1982), p. vii.

Tudeh. Ordinary Iranians were willing to demonstrate their support for the monarch only when they became convinced, through the pro-Shah demonstrations in the streets that others were doing the same.

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(U) Historians arguing that Mossadeq would have fallen anyway fail to answer a critical related question: Without US intervention, what would have replaced him? In August 1953 Iran seemed more likely to degenerate into chaos than to experience a stable transfer of power from Mossadeq to someone else. No potential prime minister was strong enough to command a majority in the Majlis, or even to form a coalition government out of the factions and splinter groups comprising Iranian politics. If Ayatollah Kashani, whom the US had briefly considered supporting in mid-1953, had somehow been able to succeed Mossadeq, his government might have resembled Ayatollah Khomeini's regime more than Fazlollah Zahedi's.

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(U) If the United States and United Kingdom had not intervened in Iran's chaotic politics in August 1953, would Ayatollah Khomeini have been able to launch his Islamic Revolution 25 years later? Asking this question is like asking whether World War II would have been fought if Germany had won World War I and Hitler had remained an obscure corporal. We cannot know the consequences of events that did not happen, but we can engage in informed speculation.

(U) Revisionists contend that CIA stifled Iran's drive to democracy and strengthened the rule of the autocratic Shah, thereby making Khomeini's revolution all but inevitable. Despite its faults, in this view, Mossadeq's Government represented the popular will. His government reflected a vision for Iran's future that the Shah did not share. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi wanted to transform Iran into a modern Westernized state; his people preferred a more traditional society.

(U) In removing Mossadeq, the revisionists continue, the United States and Britain effectively strangled traditional Iranian nationalism. Frustrated and resentful, the people rose 25 years later in rage against the Shah and the United States, disparaged as the "Great Satan." For there can be no doubt that despite years of official American and British denials, most Iranians have been convinced of the CIA's role in Mossadeq's fall.⁹

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(U) A problem with this thesis is that Mossadeq's Iran was not moving toward democracy. The Prime Minister's increasing political isolation and the fragmentation of the National Front, as documented above, had weakened his position and made him desperate. His dictatorial grab for power from the Majlis alienated his former allies and gained him new political enemies. Iran was, to repeat Iran specialist Kuross Samii's apt metaphor, "an old ship swept away by a storm with no one on board capable of dealing with the attendant frenzy."¹⁰

(U) In fact, Khomeini's revolution was a reaction against secularism, modernization, and the Shah's misrule, not a push for a return to the National Front. The streets of Tehran rang with shouts of fanatical support for Khomeini rather than nostalgic calls for Mossadeq. The Ayatollah was not interested in Mossadeq or the things he stood for. The last thing Khomeini wanted was a secular government with multi-party participation. He would have called for fundamentalist revolution against *any* government, including a National Front or Tudeh Government, that promoted modernization, the emancipation of women, and secularization.

(U) Edward Shirley, the former CIA DO employee who journeyed through revolutionary Iran, argues that the revisionist thesis also underestimates the role the clerics played in TPAJAX. Without the support of Ayatollahs Kashani and Behbehani, Shirley doubts the covert political action could have succeeded. What the ayatollahs did in 1953 with American and British help, they might have been able to do later without such help. Alternatively, given Mossadeq's growing political weakness and isolation from Iranian society, the clerics may have defeated him and the National Front in general elections.

(U) In short, according to Shirley, the 1953 aborted-democracy theory is appealing, but is "too convenient in its diabolization of the CIA and MI6, and too Persian in its determination to make someone else responsible for failure."

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History of Iran, vol. 7, *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 263.

¹⁰(U) Kuross A. Samii, *Involvement by Invitation: American Strategies of Containment in Iran* (University Park, PA: the Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 143.

¹¹(U) See Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: the Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

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¹²(U) Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p. 384.

¹³(U) Ibid.

Postscript

(U) The Shadow of the Pahlavis

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(U) The average Iranian still believes that the British and Americans are omnipotent and that if they removed Mossadeq, either or both somehow put the mullahs in power. Edward Shirley's *Know Thine Enemy: A Spy's Journey into Revolutionary Iran* recounts several conversations he had with Iranians while traveling through that country. One asked Shirley for help:

(U) 'Americans should help us. Your secretary of state was spit upon by Khomeini. He calls Iran the most evil state in the world, but he does nothing. Unless you want Iranians thinking that you like the mollahs, you should bring them down. The British put them in, and America should drive them out. The young Shah, he is like his father, a coward. And the United States wastes money on him. Iranians don't want to fight anymore. They need a sign from America.'

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Another told Shirley it did not matter what Iranians thought. ““It only matters what the Americans and the *Englisss* think. They hold the power. The *Englisss* have always had the clergy in their pockets.””²

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² (U) Edward Shirley, *Know Thine Enemy: A Spy's Journey into Revolutionary Iran* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), pp. 75, 106.

³ (U) See Harold Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), pp. 264-70. SAVAK's successor in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Aminat-e Keshvar (VAVAK), known in the West as the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). According to historian Carl Wege, VAVAK “is noted primarily for assassinating Iranian dissidents abroad” and has been doing so since the revolution in 1979. Its first victim was the Shah's nephew Shahriar Shafiq (in Paris, December 1979), but its most famous victim was former prime minister Shapour Bakhtiar, assassinated in August 1991. Carl Anthony Wege, “Iranian Intelligence Organizations,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 10 (Fall 1997): 289. Heritage Foundation Senior Policy Analyst James Phillips writes that “more than a dozen Iranian dissidents have been assassinated in European cities since 1987.” VAVAK even struck in the

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United States, murdering Iranian political activist Ali A. Tabatabai, founder of the Iran Freedom Foundation, in his Bethesda, Maryland home in July 1980. James Phillips, "The Challenge of Revolution in Iran" Heritage Foundation Committee Brief No. 24, 29 March 1996.

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2 (U) "Iran: Internal Security," DODOD 141-2B, 21 May 1993. The information in this report is classified TOP SECRET UMBRA NOFORN; the title is unclassified. The report, already five years old, states that Iran's various tribes have not been a serious threat to Tehran's rule for several years. No reporting since then has warranted a qualification or change of that opinion.

