

State Department Publishes Formerly Expunged Documents on 1953 Iran Coup

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A man erases “Yankee Go Home” graffiti from a wall in Tehran, the capital of Iran, in 1953. ([Wikimedia Commons](#))

On June 15, the U.S. State Department quietly published new information on the 1953 Iran coup and the Central Intelligence Agency’s tactics in toppling Iran’s government. “[Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951–1954](#),” posted on the U.S. Office of the Historian website, contains over 1,000 documents related to the 1953 coup.

The [Associated Press](#) explains:

Once expunged from its official history, documents outlining the U.S.-backed 1953 coup in Iran have been quietly published by the State Department, offering a new glimpse at an operation that ultimately pushed the country toward its Islamic Revolution and hostility with the West.

The CIA’s role in the coup, which toppled Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh and cemented the control of the shah, was already well-known by the time the State Department offered its first compendium on the era in 1989. But any trace of American involvement in the putsch had been

wiped from the report, causing historians to call it a fraud.

The papers released this month show U.S. fears over the spread of communism, as well as the British desire to regain access to Iran's oil industry, which had been nationalized by Mosaddegh. It also offers a cautionary tale about the limits of American power as a new U.S. president long suspicious of Iran weighs the landmark nuclear deal with Tehran reached under his predecessor.

It exposes "more about what we know about this milestone event in Middle East history and especially U.S.-Iran history. This is still such an important, emotional benchmark for Iranians," said Malcolm Byrne, who has studied Iran at the non-governmental National Security Archive at George Washington University. "Many people see it as the day that Iranian politics turned away from any hope of democracy."

"The plot was eventually successful, although knowledge that the CIA had been involved led to widespread popular anger that some have said laid the conditions for the Iranian Revolution of 1979, when the U.S. Embassy was occupied," [teleSUR English](#) says. "The documents reveal the CIA, working closely with [the] U.K., was deeply concerned by their loss of oil hegemony in the country."

It continues:

"The things we did were 'covert'," President Dwight Eisenhower remarked in a diary entry included in the recently released documents. "If knowledge of them became public, we would not only be embarrassed in that region, but our chances to do anything of like nature in the future would almost totally disappear." ...

One CIA official articulated U.S. and British fears well when he said in a letter to Eisenhower that since Mosaddegh's election, there had been "a steady decrease in the power and influence of Western democracies and the building up of a situation where a Communist takeover is becoming more and more of a possibility." ...

In documents taking stock of "western assets" in Iran months before the coup took place, the CIA notes that they were stockpiling "enough arms and demolition material to support a 10,000-man guerilla organization for six months." They were also paying millions of dollars in bribes, and were supplying arms and payment to tribal groups in the south to organize a "resistance" to the Iranian government.

In documents which detail operations in the region, paragraphs subheaded as "political and psychological warfare," and "paramilitary operations" are still left classified, leaving the full extent of some operations a mystery. ...

Documents refer to a "group serving the CIA which is capable of providing reasonably effective pro-Shah propaganda," although they acknowledge their limitations in effectively countering the pro-Mossaddegh sentiment.

Touching on the need to bolster a "propaganda machine", as they refer to it, an official suggests that following a successful coup "the U.S. might covertly assist in subsidizing some pro-government newspapers and could openly make radio equipment and technical advice available to a new government's effective operation of Radio Tehran."

“complements Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume X, Iran, 1951–1954, published in 1989, by providing documentation on the use of covert operations by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.”

Find the full set of documents [here](#).

—Posted by [Emma Niles](#)