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25.08.2013 19:36

"Perfidious Albion"- the View of the U.S. National Security Archive?

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This week, to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the CIA-MI6 overthrow of the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossaddegh, on 19th August 1953, the (US) National Security Archive has released documents confirming the details of the coup and the grubby US-UK involvement. (i)



The document makes fairly clear that the British government has fought for much of the sixty years to prevent revelations of details of another shameful event - which has anyway long been public knowledge, if not in minute detail.

The document: "CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup", a posting of recently declassified documents, "includes what is believed to be the CIA's first formal acknowledgement that the agency helped to plan and execute the coup."

Page one, sub-headed: "Decades of Delay" questions: "Have the British been meddling with the FRUS (Foreign Relations of the United States) Retrospective Volume on 1953?"

In paragraphs which will surely raise questions as to possible ongoing current misleadings about Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria, the document states: "The United Kingdom sought to expunge 'very embarrassing' information about its role in the 1953 coup in Iran from the official U.S. history of

the period, British documents confirm. The Foreign Office feared that a planned State Department publication would undermine U.K. standing in Iran ..." The cynic might ask: What standing?

Further: "The British censorship attempt happened in 1978, but London's concerns may play a key role even today in holding up the ... long awaited history - even though U.S. law required its publication years ago."

The dogged academics at the National Security Archive obtained the released documents through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, but opine that they feel that CIA intransigence is less to do with its own role in a decades ago coup, but: "its desire to protect lingering British sensitivities about 1953 - especially regarding the activities of the U.K. Intelligence services. There is also evidence that State Department officials have been just as anxious to shield British interests over the years." Presumably in case they want a smallish island off France to act as "coalition" in further foreign shenanigans, as in recent years.

The U.S. Historical Advisory Committee too had attempted to work with the British on an Iran retrospective volume as a joint venture "but the idea evidently went nowhere."

In seemingly a tacit rebuke, the Archive document points out that the CIA has even released "troubling materials such as assassination manuals that demonstrate how to murder political opponents using anything from 'edge weapons' to 'bare hands', and in 2007 released details: "from planning to poison foreign leaders to conducting surveillance on American journalists."

Given that such deeply embarrassing information has been released, it is queried that regarding Iran: "Perhaps the British are just saying no and their American counterparts are just going along."

Malcolm Byrne, Archive Deputy Director comments on the non-sensical refusal to release such ancient material, since: "The basic facts are widely known to every school child in Iran. Suppressing the details only distorts history and feeds in to myth-making on all sides."

The basis for the Anglo-American Iranian coup has resonance for more recent ones. Think Iraq, Libya, the bloody meddling and arming of the organ eating cannibals and beheaders in Syria, legitimized by being called "opposition."

In 1951, the Iranian parliament, under the leadership of the nationalist movement of Mossaddegh, voted unanimously to nationalize the oil industry. This shut out the immensely profitable Anglo-Iranian Oil Company which was a pillar of Britain's economy and political clout. In July 1952, Mossaddegh was elected Iran's Prime Minister.

Under the direction of Kermit Roosevelt Jnr., grandson of former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and CIA Director of Plans, the CIA and British Intelligence funded and led a campaign of black propaganda and bribery leading to a coup d'etat to overthrow Mossaddegh, with the help of military forces loyal to the Shah (Operation Ajax.) The plot hinged on orders signed by the Shah to dismiss Mossaddegh as Prime Minister and replace him with General Fazlollah Zahedi, a choice agreed on by the British and Americans.

How history repeats, as they agreed on puppet Prime minister Nuri al- Maliki in Iraq, President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan and, with France, Libya's post coup Prime Minister Ali Zeidan.

After the Iranian coup it was business as usual for Anglo-Iranian Oil, apart from their name change to British Petroleum Corporation (now BP) in 1954.

There was little the plotters did not map out. On 22nd July 1953 the CIA outlined the U.S. statement in anticipation of "a successful coup." It should read along the lines of: "crediting the Iranian people, under the leadership of their Shah" for the coup, which, it is pointed out: "Tracks precisely with the wording used by the State Department and the (UK) Foreign Office in their official paperwork" after their shameful overthrow.

Mohammad Mossaddegh was imprisoned for three years, then spending the rest of his life under house arrest until his death in 1967. He was buried at home, since a public funeral, it was thought, might ignite passions under a populace now under the iron rule of the US-UK's pet Shah, whose fearsome secret police (Savak) were trained by the father of General Norman Schwarzkopf - of 1991 Iraq war and "no one left to kill" comment.

A special commendation was recommended for the communications personnel who served in Operation Ajax for coping with: " ... the exceptionally heavy volume of traffic which the operation has necessitated." A comment is made on the poignancy of this remark: "given how little of that documentation has survived."

The references to terms such as "embarrassing things about the British" were documents released, are fairly numerous.

The episode further, led to deep mistrust between Iran and the U.S.-U.K., it is implied. Goodness, extraordinary.

There is much more fascinating reading, with appended documents.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/>

Felicity Arbuthnot

Photo: Jallianwala Bagh memorial, scene of a British massacre

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