

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

Scott A. Koch

**History Staff
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, DC
June 1998**

**CL BY: 2176075
CL REASON: 1.5(c,d)
DECLAS ON: XI, X5
DRV FROM: LIA 3-82, MET 31-87**

E

J

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.

[

]

(U) "Iran: Internal Security, DODD 141-ZB, 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.

100

100

100

100

Postscript

(U) The Shadow of the Pahlavis

[

]

(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.'

[

]

(U) Source and Classification Note

┌

┐

(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

┌

┐
┌
┐ (U) Copies of cables sent 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.

(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."

[

]

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).

[

]

(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 Mossadegh 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

[

]

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.

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

Blank
Page

[

[REDACTED]

(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

[

[REDACTED]

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

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

L

I

³(U) HISTORIAN ROBERT CONQUEST'S TERM. See, Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (New York: Viking Press, 1991).

(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.

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.

[

]

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.

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

[

]

(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 []

[

]

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

[

]

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.

E

I

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.

[

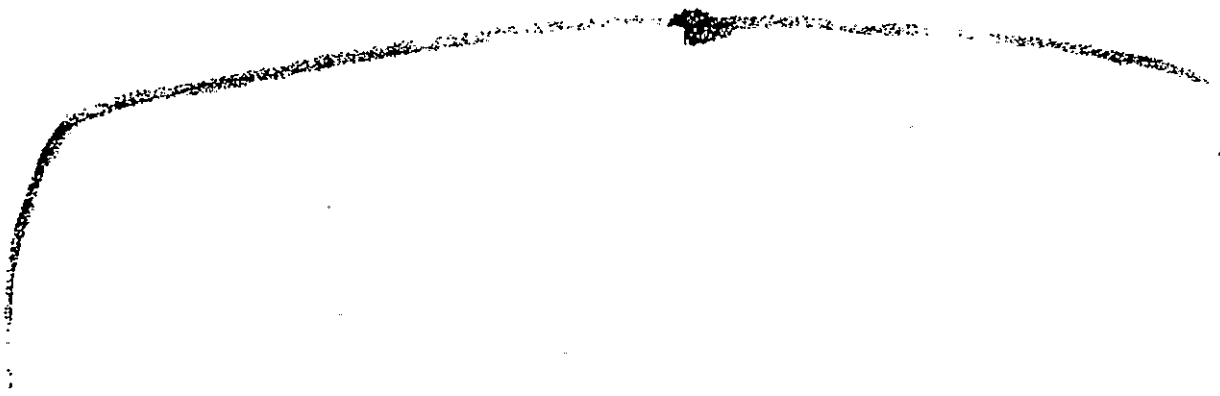
]

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.

[

]



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) 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. The

Chapter 5

(U) Aftermath

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.

[

]

(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.

[

]

[


]

(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

[

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

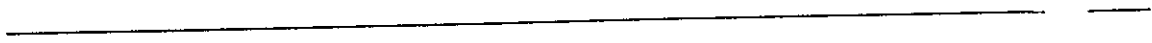
[]

] (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

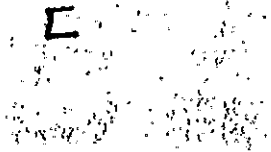
[

] (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.



Chapter 32

(U) Planning the Operation



1

(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 Hersh, *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.

(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.

[
 [REDACTED]]
(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.

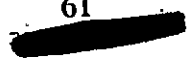
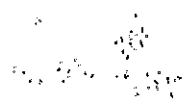
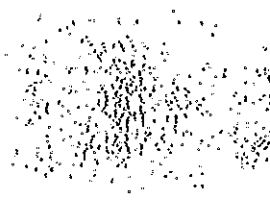
(U) Iranians idolize acrobats and weightlifters in the same way that many Americans idolize baseball, basketball, or football players. The sight of these men tumbling or exercising in unison with dumbbells drew a crowd in an astonishingly short time. Moreover, the country's most famous athlete, Shaban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

[
 [REDACTED]]
(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.

£

]



(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

┌

└

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.

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

┌

┐

²⁸(U) Ibid.

²⁹(U) Ibid.

┌

┐

[

]

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.

[

]

Chapter 4

(U) Victory

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

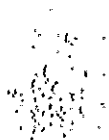
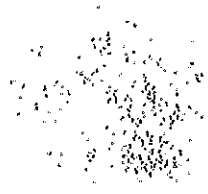
(U) Roosevelt knew he held at least two powerful cards in the Shah's *firmans*. Although Zahedi was hiding from Mossadeq, under the Iranian Constitution he was the legal Prime Minister of Iran and Mossadeq was not. Roosevelt was convinced that if he could publicize and emphasize that theme, Mossadeq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

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.

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

⁴⁸(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.

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



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.

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.

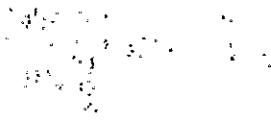
33(U) Ibid. (S). Wisner's idea of the "public" probably was narrow. Most Americans did not read *The New York Times* and could not have told him whether Iran was in the Middle East, South America, or North Carolina.

[REDACTED]

E



I



[REDACTED]

(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

[REDACTED]

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.

[REDACTED]

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.

[REDACTED]

Chapter 3

(U) Execution and Initial Failure

L

I

(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.

[REDACTED]

(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.

[REDACTED]

(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.

[REDACTED]

E

I