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A Cold War Narrative: The Covert Coup of Mohammad Mossadegh, Role of the U.S. Press and Its Haunting Legacies

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A COLD WAR NARRATIVE: THE COVERT COUP OF MOHAMMAD MOSSADEGH, ROLE OF THE U.S. PRESS AND ITS HAUNTING LEGACIES

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ABSTRACT

In 1953 the British and United States overthrew the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in what was the first covert coup d'état of the Cold War. Headlines and stories perfectly echoed the CIA and administration's cover story – a successful people's revolution against a prime minister dangerously sympathetic to communism. This storyline is drastically dissimilar to the realities of the clandestine operation.

American mainstream media wrongly represented the proceedings through Iran strictly Cold War terms rather than placing it in it rightful context as a product of the Anglo-Iranian oil nationalization crisis. In relying on narrow Cold War ideologies, the press disguised the true nature of the events and kept the American public blind to the realities. Furthermore, a complacent and silent press allowed the overthrow of the nationalist Prime Minister – one of Iran's most democratic leaders – to go unchallenged in public spheres of deliberation and enabled its tragic consequences to go concealed and unexamined.

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CHRONOLOGY:

October 1949 – Formation of the National Front

April 1951 – Mossadegh named prime minister; Oil Nationalization Law passed

May 1951 – Shah ratified Oil Nationalization Law

June 1951 – NIOC takes over industry

July 13, 1952 – Mossadegh seeks special powers for six months

July 13, 1952 – Mossadegh resigns

July 21, 1952 – "Siyeh-e Tir" – Mass uprisings

July 22, 1952 – Mossadegh renamed prime minister

October 1952 – Break in Anglo-Iranian relations; All British citizens must leave

July 8, 1953 – Eisenhower announces no aid

July 14, 1953 – National Front deputies resign from Majles

August 3, 1953 – Referendum to dissolve Majles

August 15, 1953 – Failed coup; Shah flies to Baghdad

August 19, 1953 – Coup

August 21, 1953 – Shah returns

October 1953 – U.S. grants Iran $45 million; AIOC renamed British Petroleum

September 1954 – Consortium Oil Agreement

INTRODUCTION:

THE UNITED STATES, IRAN AND MOSSADEGH

From the ashes of World War II rose a new geopolitical power structure with the United States and Soviet Union as the leading superpowers. As the design of a post-war world commenced, it became increasingly clear that each held highly conflicting economic and political views. This competition for power, coupled with an intense mutual distrust, quickly manifested as the bipolar ideological struggle between the Capitalist West and Communist East known as the Cold War.

The nearly half a century long struggle never materialized as a conflict of direct military combat between the U.S. and Soviets. Instead, it played out across the globe through a series of local conflicts understood purely through the bipolar prism of the great East-West divide. One of the earliest of such conflicts involved Iran and the covert coup d'état of the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967) in the summer of 1953.

The fall of Mossadegh was portrayed in American media as popular uprising against an incompetent prime minister. However, the realities of his demise and the reinstatement of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) were drastically dissimilar. This changeover of power was ultimately the product of a clandestine coup orchestrated by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency – an operation that would remain publicly veiled and misunderstood for decades to come, only to be more recently reconstructed through various materials, including private government documents, correspondences, memoirs and many sanitized reports.

In presenting a contextual and cohesive understanding of the events of the coup d'état and the ways in which it and Mohammad Mossadegh were portrayed in the media at the time, it becomes clear that the coup was a product of the Anglo-Iranian oil nationalization crisis and, while the British may have been the instigators, the role of the United States was direct. However, despite certain speculation, American media picked up on neither of these critical elements. Instead, the covert operation read as a completely internal matter – a popular revolt brought about by widespread dissatisfaction with Mossadegh's ineffectiveness and incompetence. This succession of events appeared perfectly plausible and palatable to the American public because the press consistently relied on a Cold War ideological narrative that (1) falsely stressed the communist threat and (2) employed a distinctly condemning and imperialist rhetoric to characterize the Prime Minister and Iran. This passive, deceptive, and ultimately silent narrative allowed the realities of the coup d'état – and its disastrous long-term consequences – to go unexamined in the public sphere.

SITUATING THE TOPIC

Many books and essays on American foreign policy during the Cold War are essentially oblivious to the possibility that policy-making, intelligence-gathering, war-making, and mainstream politics are profoundly shaped by a social and cultural world beyond the conference table and the battlefield. However, political struggles are created and defined within a particular historical and cultural context, and thus the two are irrefutably connected.

In their book *The U.S. Press and Iran*, William Dorman and Mansour Farhang examine the relationship between politics and culture, focusing on American news media and U.S. foreign policy in Iran between 1951 and 1978. They explain that while the press cannot *make* foreign or defense policy, it does assist in *setting the boundaries* within which policy is made. Or in other words, the press "frames a highly generalized *sense of things*: of what is required and of what is not; of who is enemy and who is friend. The press sets the broad limits of our thinking about the 'other.'"[1] While I am not focusing on the explicit relationship between press and policy, Dorman and Farhang's fluid understanding of the media's role in shaping a general atmosphere within which political conflicts are conceived remains critical.

Another related and critical source is the work of Mary Ann Heiss. Between her book, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain and Iranian Oil*,[2] and essay, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas,"[3] Heiss insightfully explores the oil nationalization crisis and Western media's portrayal of Mohammad Mossadegh through a cultural and gender based analysis. Furthermore, she places these depictions in a context relevant to Iran.

A sufficient amount of scholarly work specifically focuses on the events of the coup itself. The work of accredited historian Ervand Abrahamian, including his

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[1] William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 19 (emphasis added).

[2] Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (Columbia University Press, 1997).

[3] Mary Ann Heiss, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas: Anglo-American Cultural Perceptions of Mohammed Mossadeq and the Iranian Oil Nationalization Dispute," in *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World Since 1945*, ed. by Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 178-194.

journal article "The 1953 coup in Iran"[4] and recently published book *The Coup,* [5] provides the most updated, informed and definitive "reconstruction" of the coup. I rely principally on these two sources in my summary of the coup. However, it is also pertinent to mention two other relevant accounts: Moyara de Moraes Ruehsen's journal article "Operation 'Ajax' Revisited"[6] and Mark Gasiorowski's "The 1953 coup d'état in Iran."[7]

In re-examining and drawing on the various sources aforementioned, while also incorporating my own analysis of primary media sources, I seek to present a contextualized and deeper understanding of the coup d'état, how the events of August 1953 and the Prime Minister were portrayed in American popular press, and the consequences of such representations. I then conclude by briefly examining the haunting legacies of the covert operation itself.

COLD WAR CONTEXT: AMERICAN EMPIRE AND THE THIRD WORLD

The clandestine operation that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh – one of Iran's most democratic leaders – was born out of the particular cultural and political context that was the Cold War. Justified by the threat of communist subversion, the United States intervened in a wide series of proxy wars, covert coups, and counterinsurgencies, engaging a variety of satellite regimes. These

[4] Ervand Abrahamian, "The 1953 coup in Iran," *Science & Society* (2001): 182-215.

[5] Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern US-Iranian Relations* (New Press, 2013).

[6] Moyara de Moraes Ruehsen, "Operation 'Ajax' Revisited: Iran, 1953," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 3 (1993): 467-486.

[7] Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 coup d'etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 03 (1987): 261-286.

regimes – many of whom were brutal dictators – became the cores of American modern empire. Thus, by assuming world leadership and global responsibility in its insistence on "spreading democracy" and defending the "Free World" against Soviet political domination, American policymakers at once denied imperialism and enacted it. Consequently, this ideological rhetoric that defined the Cold War period operated as a guise of what is arguably an imperial project.

The term 'imperialism' used here is not synonymous to its historical definition as an extension of one state's legal dominion over another. This new notion of imperialism is born in today's postcolonial world of 'neo-colonialism' – the practice of using capitalism, globalization, cultural forces, satellite regimes and covert action to marginalize and control a country. In the same awareness, 'American Empire' thrives on the denial of imperial ambition and falls under the modern notion of empire, which "lies concealed beneath some ideological barrier or juridical concept – commonwealth, alliance, free world, the West, the Communist bloc – that disguises the actual relationships among its members."[8]

Furthermore, Cold War history cannot be narrowly defined as a conflict of interests and ideology between two superpowers. The mainstream understanding of the Cold War paradigm as an "East-West conflict" severely distorts the lived experiences of the global struggle. Within this global bipolarization, the notion of the Third World took shape and with it a neutral, anti-imperialist, nationalist, ideological and political project, referred to as the Non-Aligned Movement.

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[8] Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The costs and consequences of American empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2001), 19.

Throughout the nearly half-century long conflict, the Third World occupied a critical space both ideologically and geographically – a role that is too often overlooked.

Moreover, the conception of the Cold War as a purely ideological conflict fundamentally contradicts the wider non-western, postcolonial experience of the Third World. Critical attention must be paid to, "the reality of tragic mass death embedded in this history, [and] the enduring legacy of the tragedy in the societies once seized by radical and violent bipolarization of social and political forces."[9] Under the veils of ideology and discourse, the Soviet Union and United States engaged in a series of violent and often ironic 'interventions' that crushed hopes for any form of organic democracy and consumed many of these countries in vicious civil wars and various forms of organized political violence. It is in this history and understanding of American empire and the Third World that the coup d'état of Mohammad Mossadegh takes place.

LEADING UP TO THE COUP

Before getting into the specific events of the coup, it is important to look at the circumstances in which the operation manifested. As touched on, throughout the Cold War, Washington and the CIA viewed the world as an ideological battleground and saw every local conflict through the prism of the great East-West confrontation. Furthermore, after World War II, many CIA agents and numerous government officials became convinced of the moral superiority of U.S. and allied forces. Each held an idealistic and romantic view of the validity of U.S. values in its struggle

[9] Heonik Kwon, *The other cold war* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.

against communism. The CIA in particular shared a defining conviction that they were doing the "vital dirty work of freedom."[10]

The early 1950s marked a period of heightened Cold War paranoia. The "fall" of China to the Communist party in October of 1949 sparked resilient anti-communist sentiments throughout Washington and the greater United States public. In the 'if you're not with us, you're against us' climate, any country not decisively allied with the United States was viewed as a potential enemy. This atmosphere would be a defining factor in not only the Eisenhower administration's assessment of the situation in Iran, but also the way it was portrayed by the media and received by the public.

In terms of the situation in Iran, while it was never an official colony, the country's independence was "violated whenever it suited European Great Powers to do so. Cultural disrespect, economic domination and imperial manipulation characterized Europe's relationship with Iran for much of the century leading up to 1950."[11] One of such means of exploitation was the British dominated Anglo-Iranian Oil Company established in 1908. The subsequent oil agreement signed by Reza Shah – Muhammad Reza's father – in 1933 provided a new sixty-year concession and further positioned Iran's economic development in the hands of Europeans.

However, with the resignation of Reza Shah in 1941 and the ensuing turbulent social and political scene, new opportunities for political activity opened

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[10] Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's men: An American coup and the roots of Middle East terror* (John Wiley & Sons 2008), 4.

[11] William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East* (Vol. 2. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 269.

up.[12] Thus the first twelve years of Muhammad Reza Shah's reign was marked by a combination of domestic unrest and foreign pressure, which he and his government had difficultly effectively navigating. Within this climate of unrest rose the charismatic Mohammad Mossadegh – a staunch nationalist with a fierce vision of an independent Iran free from the shackles of any form of imperialism or foreign influence – both Western and Eastern.

A leader of a populist, antiroyalist movement, Mossadegh was known for his support of parliamentary democracy and strong opposition to foreign activity in Iran. Furthermore, he earned a reputation among the Iranian people as a politician of immaculate honesty and integrity. Born into a landed aristocratic family, Mossadegh was educated in Europe and earned his doctorate in law. In 1915, he entered state service and for the next several years led an active political life as cabinet minister, provincial governor, and Majlis (parliament) deputy.

Under Mossadegh's leadership, in 1949 several political parties and interest groups – brought together by their common opposition to foreign influence and the expansion of royal authority – formed the National Front. Their goals included: replace the personal rule of the monarch with the rule of constitutional law, make the military subject to the will of the parliament rather than the sovereign, redistribute the wealth and land of the privileged elite, and ultimately establish an alternative to royal autocracy.[13]

Mohammad Mossadegh and his campaign for nationalism successfully captured the imagination of the people, and in April 1951 he was democratically

[12] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history*, 267.
[13] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history*, 269.

elected prime minister. As explained in a British Foreign Office post-mortem: "In terms of class warfare, the movement led by Mussadiq was a revolutionary drive of the three lower classes against the upper class and the British who were identified with that class." [14] The processes of colonization, which had been at work and repeatedly contested for over half a century, were being challenged with new force.

The other major party to advocate for reform was the Tudeh Party. Officially founded in 1941, the Tudeh – meaning Masses – was a reformist organization based in Marxist ideology. However, even though the party "had a Marxist orientation and adopted a pro-Soviet stance, its leaders explicitly avoided labeling themselves as Communists."[15] Throughout the events of 1953, the Tudeh would be ardently depicted by Western media as a powerful Communist force that was well positioned to take over the government. However, it will become clear that this "threat" was ultimately a rhetorical smokescreen.

[14] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 187.
[15] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history*, 268.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COUP AND THE PRESS

RECONSTRUCTING THE COUP

The origins of the coup are ultimately rooted in the Anglo-Iranian oil crisis of 1951-1953. As touched on earlier, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was viewed as a typical colonial power manipulating the host government and playing on the hierarchies of a divided society for its own benefit. However, in April of 1951, under the nationalist campaign led by the popular Prime Minister, Iran nationalized its oil; twenty-eight months later Premier Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown.

By June 1951, the majlis passed the Oil Nationalization Law and set up the National Iranian Oil Company with Iran as the new authority. Throughout the crisis, Mossadegh was insistent on national sovereignty, which meant control over the extraction, production and distribution of oil; control was the one matter that the British also were insistent on maintaining. Thus, although compromise may have externally seemed a possibility, behind the scenes neither side was willing to budge on this defining issue. Abrahamian explicitly lays out the severity of the situation: "[the British government realized] either Iran obtained control; or it did not. Mossadeq knew the same… the British drew the conclusion that the crisis could end only with the removal of Mossadeq." [16] What ensued was a propagandist campaign carried out by planting stories that discredited the Prime Minister. Furthermore, the British also worked to undermine the Mossadegh systematically by increasing

[16] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 189.

economic pressures through various means including embargos. Iran, thus, had to survive on an oil-less economy.[17]

When these attempts at destabilization and ultimate abdication failed – a testament to Mossadegh's political prowess and popular support – the British took one more bid at dislocation. After the mass uprisings and three days of bloodshed known as *Siyeh-e Tir* (July 21) – which ended with the Shah giving Mossadegh the power to appoint the chiefs of staff and the war minister – the British saw an opportunity within this "sharp clash between the Shah and the Government" and began conspiring the overthrow of the Prime Minister.[18] However, a suspicious Mossadegh ordered the British embassy shut in October 1952, and all British diplomats in Iran, including the MI6 agents working under diplomatic cover, were forced to leave the country.[19] Now unable to carry out any sort of coup d'état, the British immediately turned to the United States and harnessed the CIA.

When the British turned to President Truman for assistance in carrying out a possible coup, he was explicitly reluctant and stressed using only economic measures and constitutional means to remove Mossadegh. However, the American attitude toward a possible coup in Iran changed radically with the election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in November 1952. The new Republican administration differed markedly in its assessment of the crisis. While Truman attempted to remain generally neutral and pushed for a more peaceful solution,

[17] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 195.
[18] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 195-196.
[19] Kinzer, *All the Shah's men*, 3.

Eisenhower and his administration viewed the situation in strictly Cold War terms and were eager to take action.

Days after Eisenhower was elected president, Christopher Montague Woodhouse, a senior British agent of the MI6, met with top CIA and State Department officials. Stephen Kinzer insightfully sums up the nature of the interaction:

> "Woodhouse shrewdly decided not to make the traditional British argument, which was that Mossadegh must go because he nationalized British property. That argument did not arouse much passion in Washington. Woodhouse knew what would. 'Not wishing to be accused of trying to use the Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire,' he wrote later, 'I decided to emphasize the Communist threat to Iran rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry.'"[20]

The appeal was calculated to engage the powerful and famed Dulles brothers: Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Allen Welsh Dulles. Among the fiercest Cold Warriors, the pair drove American foreign policy of the time and established the unfortunate pattern of global intervention that defined the Cold War.

Code-named 'Operation Ajax,' the final plans of the coup were signed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on July 1 and President Eisenhower on July 11.[21] General Fazlollah Zahedi – Mossadegh's first Interior Minister – was chosen as the best coup candidate to replace Mossadegh. And while the British were unable to formally carry out the coup, they brought a variety of essential contributions to the whole venture. This included select experts on Iran, an informal

[20] Kinzer, *All the Shah's men*, 3-4.
[21] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 197.

network within the armed forces, a long-standing civilian network, as well as connections and regular meetings with a long array of influential politicians. [22]

The Americans, meanwhile, brought the more explicit assets – including the embassy compound in Tehran, its diplomats and operatives. Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA chief for the Middle East and grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, was appointed field commander and director of the coup. The main architect of the operation and expert on Iran would be Dr. Donald N. Wilber – a secret service officer who had traveled throughout the Middle East since the 1930s under various guises.[23] Other key figures include Richard Cottam, a young CIA operative in Tehran, and Loy Henderson, the U.S. Ambassador to Iran. The CIA also had at least four local agents: Colonel Abbas Farzanegan, a desk officer who spent time in Washington but was also familiar with many of the field officers in Tehran, Ehsam Lankarani, the "agent provocateur" and Tudeh activist known for being a "daredevil revolutionary," and the so-called "Boscoe Brothers," both of whom held strategic positions with Iranian press outlets and also brought with them strong ties to the mobs and gang groups.[24]

In the months leading up to the coup, the propagandist campaign against Mossadegh intensified and weapons were "dropped quietly" to the tribes and groups backing the Shah.[25] However, as the plot gathered momentum, it was Mohammad Reza Shah who began to prove himself an obstacle. Initially hesitant and indecisive, it took a great deal of persuasion for him to agree with the plans. It still

[22] Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 151-154.
[23] Kinzer, *All the Shah's men*, 162.
[24] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 198-202.
[25] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 203.

remains unclear whether or not the Shah himself actually signed the royal decree dismissing Mossadegh as prime minister and naming General Zahedi in his place. Based on assessments of a personal interaction with Donald Wilber in 1969, Abrahamian indicates, "Wilber had to forge the royal signature – which means the legal cover for the coup was itself bogus."[26] Either way, the Shah ultimately had little choice but to cooperate. Both the CIA and the MI6 worked closely to stiffen the Shah's resolve, assuring him both that the coup was feasible and that the two powers were fully behind it.[27]

With the critical backing of several royalist military forces in Iran, the plan for the coup, as explained by Abrahamian, was strikingly simple:

> In the middle of one night, Colonel Nehmatollah Nasiri, the commander of the 700-man Imperial Gaurds, was to take on armored car, six officers and two truck-loads of soldiers, and, in one clear swoop, arrest the chief of staff and the leading ministers… Nasiri was then to proceed to Mossadeq's residence and deliver him the royal decree dismissing him. If he refused to abide by the decree, Nasiri was to arrest him too. Meanwhile, another contingent of the Imperial Guards was to cut the phone lines to the bazaar and take over the main communications center as well as the headquarters of the chiefs of state. At the same time, Zahedi was to head a tank convoy to the radio station where he would read the royal decree naming him premier. [28]

Moreover, to give the coup a "veneer of popular support," the Boscoe brothers among others were to gather a "motely crew" and proceed to the radio station

[26] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 203.
[27] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 202.
[28] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 205.

looting the homes of cabinet ministers and the offices of pro-Mossadegh organizations.[29]

When the coup was put into effect it the late hours of August 15, it was expected to succeed with little resistance or obstacle. However, it quickly went off track when an Imperial Guard member, later suspected of being a secret Tudeh affiliate, tipped off his party's leaders who then divulged the plan to the Prime Minister. Thus, instead of Nasiri arresting Mossadegh as planned, Mossadegh had Nasiri arrested and dismissed the decree as illegitimate arguing the Shah did not have constitutional authority to remove prime ministers.[30] Almost immediately, the Shah fled on his plane to Baghdad, and the clandestine operation seemed to prove disastrously unsuccessful.

However, Kermit Roosevelt quickly improvised a new plan. The four army brigades still under royalist control would carry out the arrests and occupy the various strategic positions. But in order for the royalist brigades to inconspicuously obtain ammunition from closely guarded depots without sparking off a counter-reaction, Roosevelt devised an ingenious idea: "Mossadeq would be hoodwinked into calling the brigades himself."[31]

On August 17 the American Ambassador – Loy Henderson – returned to Tehran after a "prolonged vacation" (so as to be absent during the coup) and requested an urgent meeting with Premier Mossadegh. When the two met privately the next day:

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[29] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 206.
[30] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 207.
[31] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 207.

> Henderson began hinting that Washington was not sure whether Mossadeq was still the lawful prime minister... [and] continued by warning him that Iran could not possibly expect U.S. sympathy while crowds roamed the streets threatening American property and shouting 'Yankee Go Home!' [Henderson] threatened to evacuate all Americans unless firm and prompt action was taken to establish law and order… Conversely, Henderson implicitly held out the promise if such action was taken the United States would consider further assistance.[32]

The adamant U.S. ambassador tactically stressed the failure of Iranian law enforcement to protect American lives amidst the angry crowds who took to the streets pulling down royal statues and denouncing not only the Shah, but Westerners as well. While some of these demonstrations were spontaneous reactions to the attempted overthrow of the popular Prime Minister, coupist agents also intentionally and strategically buttressed the rallies.[33] Noisily acting the name of the Tudeh Party, these fabricated demonstrations worked to augment the *threatening* presence of the Eastern-oriented party. And, as Abrahamian puts it, "Mossadegh fell for the bait."[34]

Then and there, with Henderson in the room, Mossadegh called the military governor of Tehran and ordered him to "clear the streets."[35] Thus under the direct orders of the Prime Minister, August 19 conveniently began with the imperial brigades moving into the city to 'establish law and order,' while his supporters from the National Front and Tudeh Party avoided the streets. The royalist military forces then carried out the original coup plan; they occupied the communication centers,

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[32] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 208.
[33] Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 188.
[34] Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 190.
[35] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 210.

released the royalists who had been detained, arrested the chief of staff and leading ministers, and continued on to the home of the premier. By the afternoon twenty-seven tanks seized the residence of the Prime Minister. Three hours later Mossadegh was arrested, and the coup was declared a success.[36]

U.S. PRESS AND THE "THREAT OF COMMUNISM"

After reconstructing the events of the coup, it becomes clear that the operation was a product of the oil nationalization crisis and the role of the United States was not only direct, but also extended beyond the Central Intelligence Agency to include the Pentagon and State Department. However, the demise of the nationalist Prime Minster and reinstatement of the Shah played out in Western mainstream media as an entirely internal matter.

From its beginnings in 1951, the portrayal of the nationalization crisis itself was highly refracted by British and American popular press. Throughout the dispute, the British maintained they were willing to accept a "reasonable compromise." However, behind the scenes British officials were unmoving in their insistence to maintain control and concluded that the crisis could only end with the removal of Mossadegh. And when negotiations began to break down, British press releases attributed this to "Iranian intransigence."[37] More recently still, the *New York Times* cover article from 2000 – which summarized Dr. Donald Wilber's leaked confidential report on the coup – repeated verbatim Wilber's claim that these

[36] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 209-210.
[37] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 190-191.

negotiations collapsed entirely because of Mossadegh.[38] Thus almost fifty years later, the U.S. press continued to obscure the real underlying nature and proceedings of the oil crisis.

Around the confused final days of Mossadegh's authority, the American press passively opted for a simple narrative that perfectly matched the narrow bipolar Cold War ideology of the era – the communist threat. Consistently stressing the imminent "threat of communist take over" in Iran, media stories at once considerably augmented both the power of the Tudeh and it's association with the communist Soviet Union. On August 10, 1953, for example, *Newsweek* ran a CIA planted article titled "Iran, Reds…taking over," [39] which very clearly implied that the country was on the edge of falling into the communist abyss and claimed that Mossadegh was about to make a deal with the Soviets.

On August 17, 1953 – the day of the first attempt at the coup – the *Washington Post* reported: "Young Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi fled Iran today after Communist-supported Premier Mohammad Mossadegh smashed a midnight attempt by the Shah's imperial guards to overthrow him."[40] The *Christian Science Monitor* ran a similar story the following day under the headline, "Reds Bolster Mossadegh Grip."[41] And *Time* magazine's article – "99.93% Pure"[42] – explicitly equates Mossadegh to Hitler and Stalin and positions him as undemocratic and dangerously sympathetic to communism.

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[38] James Risen, "Secrets of history: the CIA in Iran," *New York Times,* April 16, 2000.

[39] "Iran, Reds…taking over," *Newsweek*, August 10, 1953.

[40] *Washington Post*, August 17, 1953).

[41] *Christian Science Monitor*, August 18, 1953.

[42] "99.93% Pure," *Time* Magazine, August 17, 1953.

Following the successful overthrow of the Prime Minister and the Shah's reinstatement, press articles covering the proceedings portrayed the clandestine operation as a people's revolution in favor of the Shah. The *New York Times* article – "ARMY SEIZES HELM" – from August 19, 1953 claims to provide a "straight forward" account of the successful "Royalist uprising."[43] A *Newsweek* article published on August 31, 1953 explains the events as "a wholly internal matter brought about by widespread dissatisfaction with the ineptitude of Mossadegh."[44] And a piece published the same day in *Time* magazine, titled "Iran: the People Take Over," explicitly clarifies: "this was no military coup, but a spontaneous popular uprising."[45] This conception of the coup as a popular revolt disguised and distorted the actual nature of the events.

The overall sentiment among the media on the final outcome was (unsurprisingly) positive and optimistic. As Dorman and Farhang point out: "The press was content to quickly offer a warm welcome back to the Shah and to reach a consensus that Iran had been spared a Communist takeover only by the narrowest of margins."[46] The *New York Times* in a front-page article headlined "Shah Instituted Iranian Reforms," began by telling readers the young Shah was completely unlike his despot father and had begun widespread reforms before the crisis began.[47] Furthermore, on August 20, 1953, the *Washington Post* wrote: "if indeed the

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[43] Kennett Love, "ARMY SEIZES HELM," *New York Times*, August 19, 1953.

[44] "Shah Return in Triumph as Army Kicks Out Mossadegh," *Newsweek*, August 31, 1953.

[45] *Time* (August 31, 1953) (Iran: the People Take Over)

[46] Dorman and Farhang, *All the Shah's men*, 48.

[47] *New York Times*, August 21, 1953.

Mossadegh regime now has been overturned, there will be cause to rejoice."[48] The following day the *New York Times* expressed "a deep sense of relief in the West" at the demise of the "rabid, self-seeking nationalist."[49] This underlying sense of assurance and relief is indicative of the United States' position and indolently subscribes to the rampant ideology of the time.

The media's reliance on the narrow lenses of Cold War ideology ultimately had severe consequences. In doing so, the press both exaggerated the influence of the Tudeh party in Iran, while also completely conflating the Marxist oriented group with the Soviet Union. The American public was thus easily able to digest and overly content accept the false storyline of an Iranian 'people's revolution' that destroyed the looming Soviet threat by dismissing a dictatorial and communist prone prime minister.

However, Mossadegh – a stanch nationalist – only tolerated the Tudeh's existence and did not actively seek its support. And while the Tudeh supported the nationalization of Iranian oil, they expressed disdain for the Prime Minster.[50] Furthermore, relatively recent retrospective memoirs by Tudeh party members suggest that they should have supported Mossadegh more ardently and that in fact their main concern at the time was to get equal access to the oil fields.[51]

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[48] *Washington Post*, August 20, 1953.

[49] *New York Times,* August 21, 1953.

[50] Foran, John. "Discursive Subversions: Time Magazine, the CIA Overthrow of Mussaddiq, and the Installation of the Shah," in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism 1945-1966*, ed. by Christian G. Appy (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 159.

[51] Professor Janet Bauer (Trinity College).

The hollowness of the Tudeh threat and a potential communist Iran is further underlined by the level at which the *fear of the Tudeh* had to be artificially created by the CIA. Scholar Mark Gasiorowski explains that on August 17 U.S. funding – of about $50,000 – was used to: "hire a large crowd that marched into central Tehran shouting Tudeh slogans, carrying signs denouncing the Shah, tearing down statues of the Shah and his father… This crowd played the role of an agent provocateur: It generated fear of a Tudeh takeover."[52] Thus, if the fear of Tudeh takeover had to be deliberately bolstered, the veracity of the threat could not have been of substance. Furthermore, Britain's conscious decision to "emphasize the Communist threat of Iran [to the U.S.] rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry" also supports the notion of an artificial threat fashioned to, as MI6 agent Christopher Woodhouse puts it, "arouse.. passion in Washington."[53] Evidently, this strategy proved effective.

In more recent years, it has become known that the CIA and State Department actually knew the threat was not of real substance. As explained by Abrahamian, "the 'communist danger' was more of a rhetorical device than a real issue… [The American government] knew that the Tudeh, even though the largest political organization, was in no position to seize power."[54] Furthermore, Dean Acheson – Truman's Secretary of State – was later honest enough to explain that there was no such 'communist danger' behind the existing claims. The Tudeh issue,

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52 Gasiorowski, Mark J. "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Iran during the Mussadiq Era," in *The Middle East and the United States: A historical and political reassessment*, ed. by David W. Lesch (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 61.

53 Kinzer, *All the Shah's men*, 3-4.

54 Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 204.

he admitted, was essentially a smokescreen.[55] Additionally, Dorman and Farhang's interview with Kennett Love – the main *New York Times* reporter in Tehran at the time – further confirms this misrepresentation of communist takeover. Love concedes, "I don't think there was ever any likelihood of the Tudeh taking over Iran."[56] Looking back it is clear that the imminent threat of a communist Iran led by Premier Mossadegh – the conception that dominated American media – is verifiably false and fabricated.

FAILURE TO UNCOVER

Nevertheless, there were a handful of articles that alluded to U.S. involvement in the events surrounding the overthrow of the Prime Minister. For instance, an eerily perceptive article – titled "Old Mossy on the Way Out?" – was published on July 13, 1953 in the *New York Post*. The article not only suggested Mossadegh's fall to an army-led coup, but also noted on the army's close ties to the United States. The author of the column, Robert S. Allen, also quoted Secretary of State John Foster Dulles saying: "Any Iranian government, other than a Communist one, would be better for us than the present government. We have found it impossible to deal with Mossadegh."[57] However, the media never picked up on this implicit chain of logic leading from the State Department to the Iranian army and the possibility of a coup.

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[55] Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup, the Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 88.

[56] Dorman and Farhang, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 46.

[57] Robert S. Allen, "Old Mossy on the Way Out?" *New York Post,* July 13, 1953.

A *New York Times* article by Kennett Love, published on August 18, also mentioned "growing [Iranian] press accusations that the United States and Henderson himself were involved in the weekend's bloodless stroke and counter-stroke exchanged between the Court and the Government."[58] This lead was never followed up on. And on August 20, 1953, the *New York Times* ran an article – "Moscow says U.S. Aided Shah's Coup" – reporting "the United States has been pictured [by Soviet news outlets] as actively intervening in Iranian affairs and as the inspirer of the attempted coup by the Shah;" however, the *Times* is explicit in dismissing the conviction as "propaganda media."[59]

The possibility of American involvement in the overthrow of Mossadegh is otherwise unmentioned in the media until over a year later when the *Saturday Evening Post* ran a pieced titled "The Mysterious Doings of the CIA."[60] This article was not only largely inaccurate, but was also prepared with the help of the CIA itself, interested in taking credit for the operation to improve "its image for efficiency."[61] *The Nation* also alluded to the untold story in a piece on Iran in late 1954: "The inside story of the 'popular revolt' which overthrew the Mossadegh regime in August last year will be known only after the various secret documents involved are made public. One may safety conjecture, however, that the story given to the press

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[58] Kennett Love, "Statues of Shahs Torn Down in Iran," *New York Times*, August 18, 1953.

[59] "Moscow says U.S. Aided Shah's Coup," *New York Times*, August 20, 1953.

[60] Richard and Gladys Harkness, "The Mysterious Doings of CIA," *Saturday Evening Post,* November 6, 1954.

[61] Dorman and Farhang, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 49.

did not tell the whole truth."[62] And still the story remained unremarked on in popular press.

The U.S.-orchestrated successful coup d'état, however, was slowly and quietly established as historical fact. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the mastermind of the operation, Kermit Roosevelt, published (with pride and critical editing) *Countercoup* – a book on the doings of the CIA in Iran.[63] More recently, the *New York Times* article from April 2000 revealed the details of the leaked CIA report on the 1953 operation by Dr. Donald Wilber. The story ran under the headline "Secrets of History: The CIA In Iran" and was treated as a substitute for the declassified files, which were supposed to have been released but had yet to surface.[64] Still, as expert Evrand Abrahamian notes, Wilber's report – which is now available to the public – is "highly sanitized."[65]

In the report, Donald Wilber overlooks Kermit Roosevelt's 'ingenious idea' – the determinant element of the coup that duped Mossadegh into calling out the imperial forces himself. Wilber is also careful not to dwell on the participant role of those outside the CIA – including the State Department, the American ambassador Loy Henderson and President Eisenhower himself.[66] Otherwise though, in terms of

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[62] A. Kessel, "Iran's Fabulous Oil and Some Popular Fables," *The Nation,* September 11, 1954.

[63] Roosevelt, *Countercoup*.

[64] James Risen, "Secrets of history," *New York Times,* 2000.

[65] Abrahamian, "1953 coup in Iran," 182.

[66] Clandestine Service History, *Overthrow of Permier Moassadeq of Iran November 1952-August 1953.* CS Historical Paper no. 208. By Dr. Donald N. Wilber, March 1954. Published October 1969.

popular press, the coup d'état of one Iran's most democratic leaders was silently accepted as history without any real media attention.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEDIA, MOSSADEGH AND IRAN

WESTERN IMPERIAL CONCEPTIONS

By August of 1953, American public opinion had been aptly prepared for the Shah's reinstatement as the legitimacy of the Prime Minister had been thoroughly discredited by the U.S. press. The quick reversal of events that brought the Shah back and ended Mossadegh's political career appeared perfectly understandable in the United States not only because of the "impending threat of communism," but also because of the distinct characterizations of Mohammad Mossadegh, the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and Iran that dominated the media.

Throughout the oil nationalization crisis and the coup, Anglo-American officials held Iranians – particularly Premier Mossadegh – to be inferior; regularly employing what Edward W. Said has termed *orientalism* when dealing with their Iranian adversaries. [67] Said explains that the 'Orient' is a byproduct of the exclusionary process involved in defining Western identity. Furthermore, within this strict understanding of 'us' versus 'them,' orientalism also involves the idea of "European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."[68] In other words, a sense of cultural superiority is ultimately internalized in American and European understandings of identity.

Additionally, Said's concept is inextricably tied to ideas of power and the imperialist mentality. By the nineteenth century, this divided and shallow

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[67] Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood*, 4.
[68] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 7.

understanding of identity had become "the hallmark of imperialist cultures as well as those cultures trying to resist the encroachments of Europe."[69] And while the United States has historically never been an explicitly imperial power, after the Cold War the U.S. emerged as the last superpower and from the start of long conflict has largely operated as an imperial power. Though less discernible, Said's concept of orientalism thus remains applicable.

The pertinence of such mentality is revealed in examining the way in which officials and the media portrayed Iran and Mossadegh; throughout the oil nationalization crisis and subsequent coup d'état, each consistently employed ideas of orientalism and Western imperialist rhetoric. As explained by Mary Ann Heiss, state officials "wrote often about the 'Iranian mentality' and the 'Oriental mind' in vague, undefined terms."[70] These prejudices were not limited to the views of government officials, but also permeated throughout the media. Journalists strongly relied on the false stereotypes and embedded patterns of cultural superiority underlying Western attitudes toward the Middle East.

MOSSADEGH, THE SHAH, AND IRAN

The language used to characterize Mohammad Mossadegh constantly condemned his personal quirks and eccentricities and portrayed him as inferior, childlike and even feminine – an unworthy leader by Western standards. The treatment of the Prime Minster in the U.S. press is well exemplified by *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" cover story. The article opens:

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[69] Edward W. Said, *Culture and imperialism* (Vintage, 1994), xxiii.
[70] Heiss, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas," 187.

> *Once upon a time,* in a *mountainous land* between Baghdad and the Sea of Caviar, there lived a nobleman. This nobleman, after a lifetime of carping at the way the *kingdom* was run, became Chief Minister of the *realm*. In a few months he had the whole world hanging on his words and deeds, *his jokes, his tears, his tantrums.* Behind his *grotesque antics* lay great issues of peace or war, progress or decline, which would affect many lands far beyond his mountains.[71]

This language depicts the Mossadegh as, non-urban, removed from reality and living in a fantastical – even fanatical – world. Additionally, the Prime Minster's name does it appear on the cover and is not mentioned until the seventh paragraph. Instead he is referred to as an "old nobleman," "willful little boy" and a "dizzy old wizard" among others. Other characterizations include "peculiar," "mercurial," "mind runs in a deep single track," and refer to "the suicidal quality of his fanaticism."[72] This rhetoric portrays him not as an educated, skilled, and charismatic prime minster, but as a caricature – a strange, narrow-minded, immature and irrational lunatic of a leader.

The press also used a gendered language when representing the Prime Minister, which worked to denigrate him as not only as a political leader but as a man. Throughout the article, Mossadegh – the character – is imbued with an aura of emotionalism and frailty. For instance, he is repeatedly described as "frail" or "fragile;" "one who frequently bursts into tears or faints;" a "weeping, fainting leader" whose "acid tears dissolved one of the remaining pillars of a once great

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[71] "Man of the Year," *Time* Magazine, January 7, 1952.
[72] "Man of the Year," *Time* Magazine (emphasis added).

empire."[73] In the gender-driven culture of 1950s America, these characteristics were held to be distinctly feminine, deeming Mossadegh unmanly and therefore unfit for office.

However, these attributes and actions – condemned as unmanly and deplorable by Anglo-American officials and media – were accepted forms of behavior in Iran.[74] As Mary Ann Heiss explains: "for the Iranian people [Mossadeq's tears] were proof of [his] deep concern for the welfare of the country, concern that was so strong that he was driving to tears when he thought about the plight to his fellow country men."[75] These expressions of emotion, so vehemently denounced by the West, were the kinds of public displays that Iranians often expected from a leader.

Furthermore, the media often labeled Mohammad Mossadegh as a dictator – a word used in reference of the Prime Minister as early as 1952 by *Time* magazine in the article "Call Me Dictator."[76] However, by 1953 – when the United State's fear (or perceived fear) that Iran would fall to the communists reached a crescendo – this authoritarian positioning of Mossadegh was prevalent. On August 17, 1953, the *New York Times* began its editorial on the hectic situation by stating: "In a confused and so far bloodless revolt… Premier Mossadegh appears to have made himself the absolute dictator of Iran, who in the Persian tradition, may be reaching for the

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[73] *Time* Magazine, June 11, 1951); October 15, 1951; November 12, 1951; November 30, 1953.

[74] Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood*, 4.

[75] Heiss, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas," 188.

[76] "IRAN: Call Me Dictator," *Time* Magazine, August 11, 1952.

throne itself."[77] The *Wall Street Journal* echoed a similar concern under the headline "Rise of a Dictator."[78] These conceptions presented Mossadegh in an increasingly reproving light.

By comparison, Shah Mohammad Reza Pehlavi – whose sympathy to U.S. objectives earned him a certain amount of respect in popular press – received a more positive characterization, but not without critical overtones. For example, *Time* magazine describes the Shah as "intelligent and devoted to the welfare of his country, around which he pilots his own B17…" However he is "as insecure and distrustful as all other elements of Persian life."[79] The distinct depictions of Mossadegh and the Shah are most clearly laid out in a *New York Times* article – "Week in Review: Reversal in Iran" – published just days after the coup:

> *The Shah,* Mohammed Riza Pahlevi, is Iran's constitutional monarch, with the power to name the Premier. He is Commander in Chief of the army. He is young (33), likes to drive fast cars, flies his own plane, has a reputation for being pro-Western and progressive in his social ideas. He also has a reputation for indecision. *The Premier,* Mohammed Mossadegh, is symbol of Iranian nationalism. He drove the British out of the Iranian oil fields--a victory which brought him tremendous popularity. He is old (72 by his own count) and internationally famous for his bizarre habits--receiving diplomatic visitors in bed, weeping profusely and fainting in public, bounding upstairs like a rabbit at formal meetings.[80]

The inclusion of such descriptions as "he pilots his own B17" and "likes to drive fast cars" – behaviors strongly correlated to mid-century Western conceptions of masculinity – work to present him as true man and thus a capable leader.

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[77] *New York Times*, August 17, 1953.
[78] Dorman and Farhang, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 42.
[79] "IRAN: Land of Insecurity," *Time* Magazine, February 5, 1951.
[80] "Week in Review: Reversal in Iran," *New York Times*, August 23, 1953.

Furthermore, the Shah is labeled as young and socially progressive, whereas the aging Prime Minister is marked by his "bizarre habits" and rendered as crazy and emotional.

The patronizing language that worked to discredit Mossadegh of any authority or legitimacy as a leader was also broadly applied to Iran and Iranians in general. For instance *Time* magazine wrote: "Mossadegh, by Western standards an appalling caricature of a statesman, was a fair sample of what the West would have to work with in the Middle East."[81] Iran is furthermore described as a "mountainous land" and "helpless country" and Iranians as an "ancient race" with a "fanatical state of mind." Other media characterizations involve such phrases as: "illiterate masses,"[82] "Iran's smelly politics," "frenetically suspicious Iranians," and "explosively chauvinistic Iran."[83] One article goes as far as to describe Iran's history as "a history of corruption, ignorance and greed."[84] Rooted in ideas of orientalism, this rhetoric is reflective the West's assumption that "the Iranian people were incapable of politics [and] that they were incapable of self-rule."[85] Such descriptions explicitly position the United States as innately superior to Iran and appeal both to imperialist discourses and notions of American empire.

In total, the U.S. press once again relied on strict Cold War ideologies when engaging Iranian politics through its overall orientalist rhetoric and distinct characterizations. The media effectively portrayed Mohammad Mossadegh as a

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[81] "Man of the Year," *Time* Magazine.
[82] *Life* Magazine, November 12, 1951.
[83] *Time* Magazine, March 19, 1951; August 27, 1951; October 12, 1953.
[84] *Time* Magazine, August 27, 1951).
[85] Dorman and Farhang, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 13.

highly irrational and discredited leader and the Shah as the obvious choice for the incapable country. This conception could not help but reinforce and continue to disguise the false narrative of the coup d'état offered by both the state and press.

CONCLUSION: CONSEQUENCES

The coup d'état of the democratically elected and widely popular Iranian Prime Minister had a material and fateful effect on Iran's history as "the 1953 coup brought down an iron curtain on Iranian politics."[86] It is justifiable to say that if the United States had not intervened in 1953, the course of postwar Iranian history would have taken a drastically different direction.

The demise of the Mossadegh's nationalist administration reestablished the royal autocracy of the Shah – ushering in an increasingly brutal regime. With the assistance of the CIA, the Shah established the SAVAK – a secret police, internal security and intelligence service. Infamous for its inescapabilty and brutality, the organization worked to strengthen the royalist regime by placing political opponents under strict surveillance and repressing dissident movements. As Abrahamian notes, after the events of 1953, "political freedom in Iran did not exist… [And] the overall picture was one of repression, manipulation, and coercion."[87] This remained the overriding situation until the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which brought an end the Pahlavi dynasty and the beginnings of an Islamic republic.

Furthermore, upon reinstatement the Shah quickly worked to improve Iran's affiliation with the West by assuring diplomatic loyalty and adopting a Western economic program of development. Iranian oil was denationalization, putting an end to the crisis. And although the arrangement gave Iran fifty percent of the profits,

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[86] Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between two revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), 265-266.

[87] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history*, 272.

it restored Western control, once again positioning Iran in the hands of foreign power.

The haunting consequences of the coup are not limited to the fate of Iran. Although the CIA and U.S. government proudly deemed the covert operation a success, today this notion of "success" has been largely tarnished in light of the arguably disastrous consequences. The coup of Mossadegh ultimately occasioned the emergence of the United States as the major regional power and set the stage for twenty-five years of close relations between the U.S. and the repressive Shah.

While Anglo-Iranian relations were restored after the coup, British dominance in the region was deteriorating, and Iran was quickly becoming a U.S. client state. Under pressure from the United States, the British were forced to accept membership in a consortium of companies – many of which were U.S. based.[88] American interference in Iranian domestic affairs intensified, and between 1953 and 1963 the U.S. provided Iran with $500 million in military aid.[89] By 1956 the United States had essentially supplanted Britain as the major foreign influence in Iran – positioning America for the first time as an essentially imperial power in the Middle East.

Furthermore, before 1953 Iranian nationals – including Mossadegh – regarded America as a positive global force and Britain as the foreign enemy. Today, however, the majority of Iranians vilify the two powers with equal measure.[90] Unlike the situation in the United States, there was a tangible awareness among

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[88] Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood*, 219.

[89] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history*, 271-272.

[90] Christopher De Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Very British Coup* (Vintage, 2013), 6.

Iranians of the American role in aborting nationalist leadership and rescinding any chances of an organic Iranian democracy free of foreign exploitation. Consequently, the coup established a deeply rooted, anti-American sentiment throughout Iran, which was only further bolstered through widespread knowledge of continued U.S. support of the brutal royal autocracy. A quarter century later, these feelings exploded in Iran ushering in the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis – when an angry mob of young Islamic revolutionaries overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking more than sixty Americans hostage. This historical context – seeded in the coup d'état of Premier Mossadegh – remains the basis for the distrust and tensions between the United Sates and Iran today.

In summary, echoing the views of Washington and the CIA, the press relied on a highly internalized, bipolar and ideological Cold War mentality of American Empire – a position that both emphasized and conflated the Tudeh and communist threat and worked to discredit Mohammad Mossadegh as a capable leader. In doing so, the media effectively and convincingly presented the events of August 1953 as popular uprising against an incapable, delusional prime minister too sympathetic to communism. However, by placing and examining the coup in its rightful context – as a product of the oil nationalization crisis – it becomes obvious that this understanding was ultimately false. The role of the U.S. was not only direct but even determinant; the Tudeh threat was of little substance; and the Prime Minster can be seen as a firm nationalist and advocate of Iranian democracy, who sought to break with a history of dependency and Western influence in his country's economy and political affairs.

The shallow and false story offered by mainstream media mystified the coup and kept the public blind to its realities. However, it is the subsequent silence of the press that left the American public as victims of misrepresentation for decades following the clandestine operation. Some thirty years later, the *New York Times* reporter Kennett Love reflected: "More and more it seems to me that the importance now of what happened was the impact of silence on history."[91] In the case of the covert coup d'état of the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, this *silence* that allowed numerous falsehoods to persist unchallenged in public spheres of deliberation, that enabled the haunting legacies to go unnoticed, and ultimately disguised the true, more imperialistic, nature of the events of August 1953.

[91] Dorman and Farhang, *U.S. Press and Iran*, 62.

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