

Political Self-destruction or Foreign Scheme: The Fall of Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadeq Reconsidered

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Abstract:

It became a refrain of most U.S.-Iran relations' literature that Mohamed Mossadeq was overthrown mainly by foreign powers in order to prolong the longevity of their ally in Iran: Mohamed Reza Shah. In this article, the political ramifications of Mossadeq's political behaviour are to be examined to pinpoint to what extent the responsibility for his unseating can be laid on him. His political performance was not shrewd enough as to retain his popular base of support, particularly his political allies. He proceeded to act in a style that seemed scornful of the political actors already active on the scene and their determination to topple him at the opportune moment, even in collaboration with foreign powers. It can be said that Mossadeq was answerable for his fall due to his lack of sober and coherent political thinking and an embrace of a populist political performance.

Key words: Nationalization, Negotiation, Overthrow, National Front, Mohamed Mossadeq, Oil.

المخلص:

أصبح من المتعارف عليه في معظم الدراسات المتعلقة بالعلاقات بين الولايات المتحدة وإيران أن محمد مصدق تمت الإطاحة به بشكل رئيسي من قبل القوى الأجنبية من أجل إطالة عمر حليفهم في إيران محمد رضا شاه. في هذه المقالة، سيتم فحص التداعيات السياسية لسلوك مصدق لتحديد مدى المسؤولية عن إقالته. أدائه السياسي لم يكن داهية بما فيه الكفاية للاحتفاظ بقاعدة دعمه الشعبية وخاصة حلفائه السياسيين. في المقابل شرع مصدق في التصرف بأسلوب بدا مهملاً بالنسبة للجهات الفاعلة السياسية النشطة بالفعل على الساحة، احتقاراً لعزمهم على الإطاحة به في الوقت المناسب، حتى بالتعاون مع القوى الأجنبية. يمكن القول إن مصدق كان مسؤولاً عن سقوطه بسبب افتقاره للتفكير السياسي الرصين والتماسك، واحتضانه لأداء سياسي شعبي. الكلمات المفتاحية: التأميم، المفاوضات، الإطاحة، الجبهة الوطنية، محمد مصدق، البترول.

1- Introduction

The story of the Iranian oil nationalization crisis, which began in 1951 when Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadeq nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), ended in the eventual overthrow of Mossadeq at the hands of foreign powers: Britain and the United States, with the assistance of some local forces. It coincided with the emergence of the movements of anti-colonialism and nationalism in the fifties, which led to the spread of calls for nationalization among Third World countries¹. This period also witnessed the emergence of the anti-imperialistic discourse that spurred the political elite to sabotage all the efforts of the great powers to exploit their countries economically and to manipulate them politically. The citizens everywhere harboured a burgeoning animosity against imperialist powers of all their different strains, particularly in Middle Eastern societies. It can be said that Mohamed Mossadeq succeeded in striking a chord with the Iranians thanks to the discourse he embraced and strived to set into motion despite all the difficulties. Apparently, he was ready to fight to the last drop in defence of his principles that were identical with those of the Iranians. The very betrayal of his political plans would lead to his consignment to the dustbin of history.

Doctor Mossadeq, who had founded the National front in 1949: a coalition of several parties and different political actors: most prominent among them are the National Party, the Iran Party, the Toilers Party, led the movement that called for restoring Iran's sovereignty over its oil resources and promoting democratic ideals. The Nationalization bill that was a far possibility at that time soon found a receptive audience that would adopt it, mainly due to the rising political consciousness amongst the Iranians. The role played by the Tudeh Party (the Iranian communist party) cannot be downplayed since they made great efforts disseminating political ideas and mobilizing the masses,

especially the working classes. Increasing education and industrialization provided a fertile ground for all political actors, especially the communists, to prosper². The decline of British influence, and other traditional imperialist powers like France, in the world encouraged the political elite to proceed with its plan, convinced of the fairness of their cause and their putative ability to stand up to any strong power. At that time, the US was still held in high esteem since it had no history of imperialism in the region. In retrospect, it seems quite natural that at this point in history such events should occur. Upon this premise, it can be inferred that those economically powerful countries should have taken the initiative and offered some concessions instead of facing any new future challenges on the part of the natives that would backfire on both sides, and in this case the vulnerable would suffer the most.

The Iranian people from all political persuasions and walks of life had welcomed the nationalization of the AIOC. It signalled the emergence of a fledgling movement that struggled to have its word in the politics of the country that of the “masses” which simultaneously set the scene for “populism” as a political current to be taken seriously. Some opponents of Mossadeq chastised him for being the epitome of such policy despite the fact that he descended from an aristocratic family. Prime Minister Mossadeq was determined to nationalize the oil industry and thus defying the West that held the this industry in its grip throughout the world. Oil Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) would break their monopoly over this industry a decade later. This event should be viewed in its wider context in order to locate the main details and actors that were responsible for it without disregarding the home-grown plots that contributed considerably to the removal of Mossadeq from power by paving the way for the Anglo-Americans to execute their coup d'état.

The aim of this paper is to study the AIOC crisis objectively without trying neither to absolve Mossadeq nor to blame the Americans and the British for their role in the coup but to describe the details of the coup by relying on descriptions taken from different accounts. It investigates primarily the wisdom of Mossadeq decisions and political manoeuvres and their impact on his downfall divorced from any reference to foreign intrigue, which had been already studied extensively. The fact of foreign intrigue cannot be denied but should be given its due without exaggeration as an important part of the plan to oust Mossadeq. By the same taken, Mossadeq political performance is to be probed in this article since he set the ground for some contributing factors to take hold, and to be used by his opponents against him later. His fickle political behaviour and lack of serious political thinking and calculation, though underestimated in most related studies, contributed considerably to his toppling. In short, the focus tends to be placed on the ramifications of Mossadeq dwindling grasp of the political reality due to his mistaken clinging to populism as a viable political tactic, which affected his political behaviour negatively. It was already his own Achilles heel.

2- The Onset of the Oil Dispute

Reza Shah waged a losing battle against the British in 1932 to cancel the D'Arcy concession that outraged the British who had resorted to gunboat diplomacy to force him to sign a new agreement in 1933³. Reza Shah ascended the Peacock throne by staging a coup against the Qajars who failed to rule the country effectively. The British role was clear since Reza Khan could not allow himself to toy with such an idea without their prior approval. The opposition then used to refer to him as the "British King". The 1933 agreement consisted in increasing the royalties from four to six shillings per ton, reduce the concession area and extend the concession for another thirty years. Britain's revenues in taxes

were more than Iran's share of royalties from this industry. The shah could not stand up to the British due to the vulnerability of his country. During the Allied invasion of Iran during the Second World War, the Soviets asked for an oil concession in the North of Iran along their shared borders, but to their dismay, a deputy sponsored a bill in 1944 that forbade the granting of any concession to any foreign power until the withdrawal of the Allied forces from Iran. That deputy was Mohamed Mossadeq. The issue of oil concessions remained high on the Soviet agenda and subsequently supported some secessionist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1946 and 1947. The Soviets soon to abandon their venture once the Iranian Prime Minister Qavam gave them the offer of an oil concession subject to the Majlis approval as a quid pro quo for their pull-out. Qavam outwitted the Soviets in an episode that exhibited how strong powers vied for control over oil resources, particularly in Iran. Oil has proved its worth as an indispensable and irreplaceable commodity during the Second World War. This episode also demonstrated that strong powers were ready to go to great lengths to ensure their oil interests since oil represented to them the future of their world positions when the post-war map would be reshaped.

In 1949, the Nationalists, who were spurred by their parliamentary majority, and driven by dire economic circumstances, expected a dramatic reversal in the terms of the concession⁴. They reached an agreement in October 1950 that was named the Supplemental Oil Agreement (SOA). Kenneth Pollack, Iran authority, explained that:

All they were willing to offer was an increase in the minimum annual royalty to £4 million, a further reduction in the area in which AIOC could drill, and a promise to train more Iranians for

administrative positions...Iran had made £16 million that year, so the increase in the minimum royalty was irrelevant; the reduced AIOC concession area would still contain all of Iran's proven oil fields; and the company had repeatedly flagrantly disregarded its previous promises to train and promote Iranians.⁵

The Iranians secured some concessions but they were not enough in contrast with the gains taken by their British counterparts. It can be said that this agreement gave them the ammunition with which to wage another round of negotiations and seek more. The British exhibited their unwillingness to reach a fair deal in an act that would be perceived as imperialistic by the Iranians.

Mohamed Mossadeq played an important part in the mobilization of the Iranians, informing them of the genuine character of their fight against foreign domination using Third Worldist discourse, mostly appealing to the masses, prevalent then. He would play a crucial role afterwards. Doctor Mossadeq was of aristocratic origins who served as minister for different stints under the shah's father with whom he disagreed later. This disagreement resulted in his political banishment to the margins for a long time. The dethronement of the shah gave him the opportunity to revive his career under his successor. Later, mutual suspicion would define Mohamed Reza Shah's relationship with him. Mossadeq was born in 1882 in Iran and studied in France and Switzerland where he obtained a doctorate degree in law. He was best remembered for his patriotism and most importantly for his incorruptibility and liberalism⁶. His fondness for democracy flowed from the years he spent studying in Europe. His inclination to feign weakness and to faint while attending meetings or in social gatherings was classed as theatre and not befitting his official position. However, his manners should not be

overemphasized but they painted a negative image of him in the political circles. This point is to be dealt with cautiously in order to avoid any kind of value judgement. Given the rightness of the cause he was advocating for, he did not succeed in achieving any political points due to his poor political performance and his inability to widen the list of his supporters.

The shah eventually succumbed to their pressure and asked his prime minister to submit the bill to the Majlis for ratification. The oil Committee rejected it because they looked for a fair deal similar to that of Venezuela with the oil foreign companies in 1948 and the prospective deal with ARAMCO that was officially signed one month later. The fifty-fifty profit-split deal that was reached between Saudi Arabia and the US had killed the deal definitively according to the British Foreign Office⁷. US companies had cautioned Washington against the spread of calls for nationalization in the Middle East, which might jeopardize their interests throughout the Third World. Their predictions would later be borne out by the Suez Crisis that damaged British prestige and invited the US to play a more assertive role for decades to come. The US would assume a strong position in this region especially with the erosion of the power of the traditional powers already in control of Middle Eastern politics. For the US to acquire more influence, it had to own more oil wells in the different oil-rich countries of the region besides those of Saudi Arabia.

The shah felt the need to secure the ratification of the bill because he was well aware of the economic and political ramifications awaiting Iran. The shah replaced his former prime minister, who was reluctant to support the Supplemental Oil Agreement (SOA) for fear of hurting public sentiments, with a General of a forceful character, Ali Razmara. Razmaravehemently defended the Supplemental Oil Agreement in the Majlis arguing that Iran lacked the technological capabilities to run such

industry⁸. The speeches of Mossadeq and Ayatollah Kashani, which were filled with hatred against Razmara describing him as British stooge, led to his assassination a few days later upon leaving a mosque. The assassination of Razmara marked the official entry of populism into the political scene. Demagoguery proved to be a useful political tool to appeal to people's hearts and rally them around their cause.

Razmarahad scorned the influence of the masses and their religious cast of mind that stemmed mainly from the nature of their shi'i society and the social transformations they witnessed then from rural milieus to urban. Khalil Tahmassibi, the murderer, was a member of a religious group (Fedai'yan Islam) that its activities would sprout in the upcoming years, reintroducing a new form of political activism based on violence. Ayatollah Kashani celebrated his assassination hailing the perpetrator as a national hero. The Grand Ayatollah Bouroudjerdi frowned upon both of Kashani and the Fedai'yan organization political activities because they were in conflict with his school's tenets that of shunning politics⁹. Regrettably, Razmara had had a fifty-fifty profit split offer in his pocket but he was biding his time before making it public in order to let the emotional nationalist fervour of the Iranians dissipate. US ambassador in Iran, Henry Grady, cabled the State Department stating that it was Razmara's lack of popular faith in his government that had prevented him from acting decisively¹⁰. Richard Cottam, Iran scholar, argued that Razmara was aware that he could not accept a new offer and survive politically¹¹. In retrospect, Razmara's approach to this dilemma proved rational enough and feasible: it was the only formula palatable to all the conflicting parties. Mossadeq had opted to adopt policies that stroke a chord with the populace but were devoid of any practical solution. He was prisoner of his

unpragmatic slogans. The very denunciation of them would turn the masses against him, which would prove their unsustainability.

Hussein Ala'a who succeeded General Razmara as prime minister had resigned because he did not want to oppose nationalization and walk against the flow. Two weeks after Razmara's assassination, The Majlis had ratified the Nationalization Bill. During the discussion of the bill in the Majlis, Mossadeq did not reject his nomination for the premiership but conditioned it on the ratification of the Nationalization Bill. His mainly-used rallying theme was to expel all the vestiges of imperialism from Iran, nationalize the AIOC and limit the shah's powers. All his slogans and discourse were the contrary of what the shah had entirely devoted himself to, that of his grandiose plans for a powerful and modern Iran. The shah finally signed the Nationalization Bill two days later, officially wresting the control of the AIOC from the British. The CIA estimated that the elevation of Mossadeq to the premiership constituted a radical departure in Iran's political development¹². They were hostile to the rise of any politician who enjoyed a base of support due to his ability to manipulate the masses, especially Mossadeq who was an indisputable demagogue.

The British expressed their anger at this agreement threatening Iran of military retaliation to restore control over the AIOC that was taken "illegally" according to them. The British remained trapped in their old self-image, refusing to adjust to changing times. This change was supposed to come from within the political establishment of Britain per se. By contrast, The Americans showed understanding for the Iranian decision to nationalize their oil with the caveat that fair compensation be paid to the British. They embarked on such initiative in order not to antagonize Iran for fear of driving it into Soviet arms and waiting to act at the opportune moment¹³. Washington favoured the

settlement of the crisis through diplomatic means because they viewed the dispute through Cold War prism, which required a wise strategy on their part best epitomized by Harry Truman. Most significantly is the pragmatic behaviour of the US that would exploit the political vacuum she already found in Iran to its advantage by gaining a foothold in the region. Britain's intransigence led to the entry of the US into Iran that would later undermine its influence there.

3- The Failure of Negotiations

The British regarded the nationalization of the AIOC as a humiliating blow to their own prestige in the Middle East that might set an example for other countries to follow if it paid off. They toyed with the idea of a military attack against Iran to restore control over oil installations and resume the flow of oil to the West. "Operation Buccaneer" was planned to siege the island of Abadan and force the Iranians to let the Tankers sail for their destinations and recover the oil industry. McGhee reported to the US embassy in Washington that the US saw grave dangers in, and could not contemplate support for, any military action by Britain¹⁴. President Truman did not support a military strike against Iran for fear of provoking a Soviet invasion that could be justified by the 1921 Friendship Treaty. The treaty gave the Soviet Union the right to intervene in Iran should a foreign power invade it. In return, the US supported Mossadeq, offering US mediation in the dispute hoping for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Nevertheless, the US never disregarded the fact of an imminent communist takeover in Iran. The Tudeh party though outlawed but displayed a political clout not to be reckoned with.

The diplomat Averell Harriman was dispatched to see Prime Minister Mohamed Mossadeq who seemed negligent of his lectures about the intricacies of the oil industry. He went to see Ayatollah

Abulkassem Kashani also who protested against the British arguing, “We have been opposed and robbed by the former oil company for fifty years¹⁵”. What Harriman had achieved was extracting a promise from the British to recognize nationalization as a *fait accompli*. It was pre-conditioned by Mossadeq to agree to negotiate with Britain. Thus, they could engage directly into negotiations with the British who were not ready to make concessions related to the issue of control. It can be inferred that the whole matter was about “control”¹⁶. Mossadeq was negotiating from a strong position as long as most Iranians did not yet feel the economic impact as they took much pride in nationalization during its first year without any concrete results¹⁷. Kashani told Stokes who headed the British mission “if Mossadeq yields, his blood will flow like Razmara”¹⁸. It seemed evident that Mossadeq was aware of the popular support for nationalization that hindered his ability to negotiate. It can be said that he was starting to surrender his fate to his Frankenstein’s monster, the masses. With the benefit of hindsight, priority had to be given to the resolution of the dispute at possible favourable terms since he was caught in a hostile picture with passive actors.

In October 1951, a new conservative government was installed in Britain under the leadership of Winston Churchill. In his electoral campaign, Churchill castigated Attlee’s government for its soft attitude towards Iran. President Truman declared his determination to settle the crisis only through diplomatic channels because any use of “gunboat diplomacy” as that advocated by Churchill would inevitably drive the Iranians into Soviet arms or create conditions conducive to it. The victory of Eisenhower in the American presidential elections would change the political arena completely. Barry Rubin, an expert on Iran, stated in his book; *Paved with Good Intentions*, the difference between Eisenhower and Truman as follows:

while Truman and Acheson felt social change was inevitable— and thus should be encouraged in a manner consistent with American interests— Eisenhower and Dulles tended to see reform movements as disruptive and as likely to be captured by local Communists. The Iran experience marked the transition from a United States foreign policy based on the first perception to one based on the second.¹⁹

President Truman was determined to reach a settlement of the crisis. He gave a final offer to Mossadeq that was supported by Churchill in February 1953. It consisted in compensation to be paid to AIOC in addition to loans from the US that could be repaid with oil²⁰. Mossadeq rejected it out of hand. It marked the last diplomatic attempt to end this dispute amicably. More importantly, Mossadeq did expect another advantageous deal under the incoming president Eisenhower. Eisenhower was convinced of the futility of negotiating with Mossadeq as long as all the diplomatic solutions were exhausted. It did not escape the notice of Steve Marsh, a historian, who reiterated continuity of US policy rather than discontinuity that characterized US attitude towards this crisis. He also reinterpreted the US support for the coup as the last of the already existing options that was endorsed by Eisenhower that such plans were not far from his military mind²¹.

After the legislative elections in July 1952, Mossadeq submitted the list of his cabinet members. To the surprise of the shah, Mossadeq named also the minister of war. It was the prerogative of the shah to appoint to this post as long as the army was the sole guarantor of his dynasty. Middleton reported that the shah would not surrender his authority over the army as long as it

is the sole source of his influence²². Doctor Mohammed Mossadeq was exploiting the popular support granted to him to acquire new powers. Consequently, he tendered his resignation and the shah appointed Ahmed Qavam in his place²³. A popular uprising calling for the return of Mossadeq followed. He was reinstated after four consecutive days of protest that left several people dead. Ironically, Qavam dismissal was his own fault because he made threats of repression²⁴. Mossadeq's allies, who rallied people to his support, organized the demonstrations, succeeding in weakening the shah politically. Kashani, who was threatened by Qavam before, rushed to support Mossadeq in his demand for extraordinary powers from the Majlis for six months. Mossadeq's acquisition of those powers would later turn his allies against him, especially with the increasing impact of the worsening economic situation.

These demonstrations announced the emergence of a new political force that was the mob. It also signalled the birth of mass-politics in modern Iranian history. Acheson had concluded that Mossadeq "emerged in a strong position vis-à-vis the shah, the Majlis, and the public than at any other time since the nationalization of oil in April 1951"²⁵. On the contrary, Ali Ansari argued, "there is little hope in forsaking the support of key social groups and relying increasingly on the Tehran mob, Mossadeq had fatally weakened his own position and essentially invited the possibility of a successful coup"²⁶. His powers could be justified if used only within the bounds of the constitution but Mossadeq tended to march forward seeking his democratic designs for his country, neglecting the environment surrounding him. His style of governance would backfire on him, as more powers were concentrated in his hands, which would make him vulnerable to accusations of tyranny by his opponents. Mossadeq had lost his political compass.

The National Front coalition began to fall apart. The army officers who had been purged by the Mossadeq after the July 1952 uprising were struggling to play a crucial role in his overthrow. Additionally, Ayatollah Kashani broke with him over cabinet appointments and the extension of the extraordinary powers. The religious class withdrew its support from Mossadeq as he strived to neutralize them politically. The defection of Kashani weakened Mossadeq. It was to prove decisive in the fall of Mossadeq²⁷. In Shi'idoctrine, people tend to follow the instructions of their sources of emulation (Marja'a Taqlid in Arabic) mindlessly. He underestimated the Islamists' control over the society and their life-long quest to assume power since the introduction of Shi'ism in 1501 by the Safavids. The inseparability of Islam and politics led the ulemas to take part in politics. His divorce with the Islamists caused his deprivation of the support of a significant segment of the population. It gave way to his opponents to caution against the filling of the vacuum by the communists. Moreover, Toiler's Baqai and Nationalist Hussein Makki defection had visibly weakened Mossadeq. The defection of his former National Front allies pushed him to rely seemingly on the support of the Tudeh party, which would vindicate Western fears.

The communists found a political vacuum that they could fill. Robert Zaehner estimated that the defection was caused by Britain, it did not happen spontaneously²⁸. The Americans were aware of the effective influence of Kashani hoping to recruit him even through granting him money because of his increasing influence not as a spiritual leader but a schemer who is capable of obtaining the funds to call out mobs from the bazaar section of Tehran²⁹. It displayed the efforts that were made by the Anglo-Americans and his domestic adversaries to have him dismissed at whatever cost. The shah felt his throne threatened by his Prime Minister Mossadeq. He had learned from his father's ascension to

power never to let any powerful figure appear on the domestic political scene as a precautionary measure against future coup d'états. Therefore, he chose to leave Iran, ostensibly for medical reasons but in reality as a traditional way of protesting against his prime minister. In response, Kashani gathered a large crowd that demanded the cancellation of the shah trip abroad and the removal of Mossadeq. This incident can be considered as a mini-coup against Mossadeq³⁰. After February 28, Dulles sent to Eisenhower "The Iranian situation has been slowly disintegrating" and "A communist takeover is becoming more and more of a possibility"³¹. This statement was symptomatic of Mossadeq frequent invocation of the Tudeh threat in order to propel the Americans to give him support. Unsurprisingly, this policy would eventually boomerang on him.

The sharp decline of oil revenues from 660.000 Barrel per day (b.p.d) in 1950, 340000 b.p.d. in 1951 to 20000 b.p.d. in 1953 had strained the economy leading the government of Mossadeq to take austerity measures³². Mossadeq started entertaining the idea of an oil-less economy in the hope of diversifying his sources of revenues. The deteriorating economic situation had lessened popular approval for his policies that weakened him more during the sensitive months of 1953. He strove to enhance his public image but to no avail because the AIOC dispute had become both political and economic. In April, the American consul at Tabriz in a message sent to his embassy had stated:

It was apparent the Prime Minister's hold over Azerbaijan had "weakened visibly" during the previous two months. The Consul noted an increasing amount of publicly expressed opposition to Mossadeq indicating a decline in his personal prestige, and that the attempt of the Prime Minister

to undermine the Throne had resulted in increasing the Shah's prestige "to the detriment of Mossadeq"³³.

It became crystal-clear that Mossadeq would not be overthrown by peaceful means. Prime Minister Mossadeq had sensed that his adversaries at home were trying to oust him illegally by giving him a vote of no confidence at the Majlis. It was the shah's long dream of having his prime minister dismissed in a "quasi-legal" fashion. The Western forces shared the same tactic with the shah and his domestic allies. Mossadeq called for a referendum on dissolving the Majlis in order to avert such a course of action. Unsurprisingly, the crushing majority of voters favoured the dissolution of the Majlis. The last act of removing Kashani from his post as head of the parliament brought the wrath of the religious factions against Mossadeq and nurtured the already existing fear of a communist takeover. The referendum was a double-edged sword: it gave Mossadeq his coup de grace and provided his opponents with the justification to remove him afterwards. To give their coup an air of legitimacy the CIA exploited the illegality of the dissolution of the Majlis and started to use it against Mossadeq who acquired tyrannical powers in an unconstitutional way.

4- The Unseating of Mossadeq

The US was already engaged in subversive activities in Iran that were directed against the Tudeh party and the communists under a program that was labelled: BEDAMN. Its agents, Jalali Ahmed and Farokh Kayvani, were later instructed with working to undermine Mossadeq and his National Front. BEDAMN was a propaganda and political action program with a fund of one million per year³⁴. The Secret Intelligence Services (SIS) used the Rashidian Brothers who were charged with leading their

intelligence network after the break of Iranian relations with Britain in September 1952. The station started attacking Mossadeq through grey propaganda³⁵. The propagandist activities were meant to outrage the clerics, and convince the Iranians of Mossadeq abuse of power and the danger of Tudeh rise to power. Richard Cottame estimated that four fifths of the existing newspapers were under their influence and manipulation³⁶. They endeavoured to undermine Mossadeq to have the flow of oil resumed and the communist threat eliminated.

Secret Intelligent Service (SIS) approached Kermit Roosevelt, head of CIA Near East Division, in Britain to gauge his response to the idea of a coup to overthrow Mossadeq. The advent of Eisenhower led the Americans to give a favourable response to the British. After the election of Eisenhower, Christopher Montague Woodhouse, a SIS senior agent, came to Washington to meet top CIA agents and State Department officials. He illustrated that: "Not wishing to be accused of trying to use the Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire, I decided to emphasize the Communist threat to Iran rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry"³⁷.

Doctor Donald Wilber, CIA consultant, and Norman Matthew Derbyshire, SIS agent, had convened to draw up the coup plan in Cyprus in May 1953. They wanted their operation to appear legal or quasi-legal rather than a coup³⁸. It was rectified afterwards in Beirut and London and was finally approved of by the US on July 1953. In Nicosia, they highlighted the crucial role that the religious leaders could play in the success of the coup. Both the US and Britain had contributed to finance the coup expenditure.

The shah met Kermit Roosevelt who urged him to dismiss Mossadeq and appoint General Fazlollah Zahedi in his place. He had a long fruitless session with the shah who was reluctant to act for he was no adventurer. The shah was informed, “the Shah should realize that failure to act could lead only to a Communist Iran or to a second Korea. Roosevelt concluded by saying that his government was not prepared to accept these possibilities and that some other plan might be carried through”³⁹. He even warned him about having his throne overthrown by Mossadeq. According to Wilber, the author of the authoritative CIA document on the coup, Roosevelt insisted: “should the shah fail to go along with the US representatives or fail to produce the required documents, Zahedi would be informed that the US would be ready to go ahead without the shah’s active cooperation”⁴⁰. They even solicited the help of his sister who told the shah to meet General Norman Schwarzkopf who was coming to Iran on a similar mission. When he met him, Schwarzkopf told the shah that they should wait until the shah dissolve the Parliament first to give an air of legitimacy for dismissing him. He was also to guarantee to the shah the collaboration between Britain and the US in this mission⁴¹. The shah eventually accepted to sign the Farman and left for Karmanshah Island. General Nassiri delivered the Farman to Mossadeq on the night of 15 August. Mossadeq claimed the Farmans were a forgery and arrested Nassiri. The shah fled to Baghdad and issued a statement telling the Iranians that he dismissed Mossadeq because he flouted the constitution.

Kermit Roosevelt never abandoned his mission to overthrow Mossadeq; he threatened to overthrow any member who harboured pessimistic feelings about the success of his mission. He exploited the domestic situation to his favour by leading fake Tudeh rallies in support of the shah. They looted shops and governmental headquarters, in addition to desecrating mosques. It was carried out by hired mobs under the supervision of Jalali and Keyvani in

the name of Tudeh⁴². Most religious leaders received threatening hate letters from alleged Tudeh activists as a part of the plan to make people feel the communist danger and to rebel against Mossadeq. These subversive activities polarized the situation. The pro-Mossadeq mobs clashed with the police and the army who displayed openly their sympathy for the shah. Roosevelt sent Ambassador Henderson to Mossadeq to complain about the way American nationals were harassed, and threatened to leave the country en masse. Mossadeq called the chief of police and ordered him to ban demonstrations. The identity of the mobs had remained a very polemical issue not yet fully revealed. It became clear how Mossadeq failed to draw masses to his support the moment he parted with Kashani and his National Front allies⁴³. On the morning of the 19, Pro-shah hired mobs with the cooperation of the army and the police dominated Tehran. Subsequently, General Fazlollah Zahedi declared himself the lawful prime minister. Mossadeq was finally overthrown.

5- Conclusion

Barry Rubin had concluded that overthrowing Doctor Mossadeq was like “pushing an already opened door”⁴⁴. It is important to highlight the contribution of the home-grown plots to the success of the coup against Mossadeq. Most Iranians tend to blame the US for killing their embryonic democratic experience. Ironically, it is hard to believe that the US had single-handedly changed the regime in Iran. Mossadeq, driven by his martyrdom complex, was reluctant to reach a settlement for fear of being labelled a traitor: the same vocabulary he had used against Razmara before. Mossadeq was also ignorant of the intricacies of the oil industry and the sensitive calculations of the Cold War. To America’s best interests, the coup had resulted in the entry of US companies into the Iranian oil industry. It resulted also in

undermining the shah's legitimacy that would haunt him for years to come.

The legacy of the coup remained engraved on all sides' minds. The memory of the coup led later to the Iran hostage crisis that was led by the revolutionaries for fear of having the shah brought back to power in a repetition of the same scenario. Barack Obama in his famous Cairo speech in 2009 acknowledged US role in the coup. To his disappointment, both countries remained trapped in the past, cursed of eternal mutual distrust. Each of them invokes a historical paradigm, like that of the 1953 by the Iranians and the Iran hostage crisis by the Americans, to hinder any prospect of future rapprochement between the two countries. Mossadeq remained a revered figure in Iran.

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