

## **The Hawks Win the Day: Allen Dulles, Kermit Roosevelt, and the 1953 Iran Coup**

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### **Abstract**

The 1953 overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh is an event that continues to carry far-reaching lessons and implications for U.S. engagement in the Middle East today. Using primary and secondary source documents from the U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, this paper demonstrates that two anti-communist hawks in the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles and CIA Middle East operative Kermit Roosevelt, played a pivotal role in influencing the president to approve the 1953 coup. By showing that Dulles and Roosevelt began advocating for Mossadegh's ouster immediately after he came to power in 1951, this essay describes the degree to which these men and their rigid, Cold-War worldview influenced this fateful decision.

**keywords:** Iran; United States; CIA; Mossadegh; Coup; Dulles; Roosevelt; Communism

As demonstrations against the government of Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh—the democratically-elected prime minister of Iran—entered their fifth hour on August 19, 1953, a voice on Iran’s national radio station suddenly exclaimed, “Long live the Shah! The Shah’s instruction that Mossadegh be dismissed has been carried out. The new Prime Minister, Fazlollah Zahedi, is now in office.”<sup>1</sup> Hours later, Mossadegh’s fall from power became official when a throng of protestors ransacked his home in Tehran.<sup>2</sup> Unbeknownst to most Americans at the time, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped engineer this seemingly-organic uprising of the Iranian people against Dr. Mossadegh, whose once-dominant domestic popularity rested on his desire to rid Iran of imperialist foreign influence that had crippled the country economically for decades.

Using primary and secondary source documents from the U.S. Department of State’s *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, I demonstrate that two anti-communist hawks in the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Allen Dulles and CIA Middle East operative Kermit Roosevelt, played a pivotal role in influencing the U.S. president to approve the Mossadegh coup. In doing so, this article builds on the work of scholars such as Stephen Kinzer (2008), who described how the British government, which wished to remove Mossadegh due to his nationalization of the majority-British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, used the threat of Iran falling under communist control to convince Eisenhower to carry out the coup.<sup>3</sup> By showing that Dulles and Roosevelt began advocating for Mossadegh’s ouster immediately after he came to power in 1951, I argue that these two men and their rigid, Cold-War worldview influenced this fateful decision to the same degree. In fact, it was the conviction of Dulles in particular that

finally made ousting Mossadegh a viable policy option in 1953; despite multiple British attempts throughout 1952 to convince then-President Harry Truman to topple the prime minister, Dulles’s promotion to DCI with President Eisenhower’s inauguration on January 20, 1953 gave coup supporters the power and influence necessary to convince the new president to approve the plan.

## Background

The oil dispute that set the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), the U.S. government, and the United Kingdom on a collision course with Mohammad Mossadegh emerged as a product of popular discontent in Iran towards the vast inequality that dominated the country, both among Iranians and between Iranians and foreign entities that benefited from Iran’s wealth of natural resources.<sup>4</sup> Years of mismanagement of state funds by the Shahs of the Qajar dynasty had left almost all of Iran’s lucrative industries, including the oil sector, in foreign hands by 1925, when Ahmed Shah Qajar abdicated and Pahlavi rule began.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Iran’s economic situation improved only marginally after the Pahlavi takeover. Although Reza, the first Pahlavi Shah, renegotiated the country’s oil concession in 1933 to ensure that AIOC would pay at least £975,000 annually to Iran’s treasury, the firm’s dubious accounting methods often prevented the Iranian government from receiving its full 16% share of the company’s profits.<sup>6</sup>

Popular dissatisfaction with Iran’s lack of sovereignty over its own oil resources became a central issue of debate in the country’s Majlis in the 1940s. Created in the midst of the 1905–1911 Constitutional Revolution, the Majlis enjoyed significant authority in matters related to the oil issue because the Persian Constitution of 1906 gave the body the power to ratify international agreements negotiated by the

Shah.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Majlis deputies placed considerable pressure on Reza's successor, Mohammad Reza, to negotiate a new deal with AIOC whereby the company would share its profits with the Iranian government on a fifty-fifty basis, a division that conformed to agreements that a number of American oil companies operating in foreign countries had reached at the time.<sup>8</sup> However, the British government, which owned a majority stake in AIOC, refused to acquiesce to this demand; at the time, Downing Street conducted its foreign policy according to the ideology of empire, a worldview that stipulated that overseas assets like AIOC were non-negotiable colonial possessions. Instead of agreeing to divide AIOC's profits evenly, the British thus offered only to guarantee that annual royalty payments to the Iranians would always exceed £4,000,000.<sup>9</sup>

Although Mohammad Reza Shah agreed to the terms of the British, the oil deal was very unpopular in Iran, a reality that made the task of convincing Majlis Deputies to ratify it nearly impossible. This responsibility fell on the shoulders of General Haj Ali Razmara, a proponent of the accord who Mohammad Reza had appointed prime minister at the behest of the British.<sup>10</sup> Razmara's 1950–1951 attempts to pass the British renegotiation deal succeeded only in fueling the popularity of the National Front, the pro-nationalization political bloc that Mohammad Mossadegh led.<sup>11</sup> Razmara's efforts also caused many Iranians to revile him; on March 7, 1951, a fanatic named Khalil Thamassebi assassinated the prime minister. Thamassebi said afterwards that he did so to “deliver the deprived Muslim people of Iran from foreign serfdom.”<sup>12</sup>

In the United States, Razmara's assassination heightened worries among policymakers in the Truman administration that the Soviet Union, which bordered Iran to the north, might take advantage of a possible power vacuum and bring the country into its

sphere of influence. Following the Soviets' first nuclear test in August 1949 and the debacle in Korea in 1950, the Cold War ideology of containment had officially taken hold of the Washington foreign policy establishment. Kermit Roosevelt and Allen Dulles, two ivy-league graduates who joined the CIA's forerunner, the Office of Strategic Services, during World War II, became the U.S. government's most prominent Cold War hawks on the Iran issue as they gained positions of influence in the CIA while the oil dispute escalated in 1951, 1952, and 1953. The following sections detail how fear of a communist takeover by the Soviet-backed Tudeh Party influenced these two men to lobby Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and prominent members of the CIA and Department of State to intervene in Iran from the moment it became clear that Mossadegh's rise to power had become a reality.

### **Razmara's Assassination: To Intervene or Not?**

Eight days after Razmara's death, Roosevelt sent a memorandum to Dulles expressing his belief that the prime minister's assassination endangered Iran's stability, to the point of requiring U.S. intervention. Commenting on a draft of a CIA Special Estimate that was released on March 16, 1951, Roosevelt wrote that the document did not accurately convey the degree of instability in Iran, disagreeing with the Estimate's assertion that “there is no immediate danger of the government's losing control.”<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt elaborated, “Frankly, we fear that this estimate may encourage a wait-and-see policy rather than the kind of vigorous action which we feel is required.”<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt's apprehension centered around the possibility that the National Front would fill the power vacuum left by Razmara's assassination. Reacting to the Iranian Majlis's March 15 decision to

nationalize AIOC, Roosevelt pointed out that “the extreme nationalists obviously have a considerable following as the recent vote on the oil issue has indicated.”<sup>15</sup> Although Roosevelt recognized the threat a British backlash against Iran over the nationalization vote would pose to U.S. national security, he feared infiltration of the National Front by the communist Tudeh Party more. Tudeh, he asserted, was “the best organized and only secure group in Iran,” adding that “even if it is admitted that the Tudeh cannot obtain control of the government, the statement that they can ‘seriously...disrupt the government’s control’ is open to serious question.” Roosevelt thus interpreted the National Front’s danger through the binary, geopolitical lens of the Cold War. Tellingly, he concluded the memorandum by observing that “under these circumstances we can see no reason why the USSR would consider armed intervention when the situation is playing so directly into their hands.”<sup>16</sup>

Dulles’s writings in the weeks following Razmara’s assassination mirrored Roosevelt’s concerns. Like Roosevelt, Dulles believed that Razmara’s death facilitated heightened communist influence over Iran. On March 28, Dulles confessed to DCI Walter Smith, the head of the CIA at the time, that “I feel that Iran may be lost to the West in the coming 12 months and believe that it is urgent to plan and carry out the steps which might change the trend and protect this vital position in the Middle East.”<sup>17</sup> To do so, Dulles argued that CIA action in Iran, which at that time included only clandestine propaganda efforts to influence the press, “should be combined with an over-all program in the economic, financial, and military fields.”<sup>18</sup> The idea that Iran could “be lost to the West,” barring immediate U.S. action, displayed the degree to which rising tensions between the Western and Eastern Blocs influenced the urgency with which Dulles viewed the situation.

Dulles’s fear of a communist takeover fueled his immediate opposition to Mossadegh, who replaced Razmara’s successor, Hossein Ala, on April 28, 1951, after the Majlis nominated him by an overwhelming vote of 79–12. At a meeting with Smith on May 9, 1951, “Mr. Dulles stated that in his opinion only one thing could save the situation in Iran, namely to have the Shah throw out Mossadegh, close the Majlis, and temporarily rule by decree.”<sup>19</sup> Given that Mossadegh’s electoral victory occurred only 11 days before, Dulles’s hawkish attitude towards the new prime minister’s government revealed that he never intended to cooperate with him.

At the time, however, other key actors at the center of U.S. foreign policymaking did not echo Dulles’s and Roosevelt’s calls for immediate intervention to halt the National Front’s rise. For one, field operatives at the CIA Station in Iran had reported just three days earlier that “we seriously doubt [the] feasibility and wisdom [of] our attempt [to] replace this [Mossadegh’s] government.”<sup>20</sup> Dulles’s and Roosevelt’s aggressive stance also contradicted the National Security Council’s (NSC’s) preference to pursue a “wait and see” policy with Mossadegh. At its May 16 meeting, the NSC agreed that “the United States Government should eschew the use of force against the present Iranian Government.”<sup>21</sup> This preference for diplomacy came in spite of British pressure on Secretary of State Dean Acheson to send in troops if Downing Street decided to overthrow Mossadegh.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to finding opposition in the NSC and among CIA field operatives, CIA officers in Washington also resisted Roosevelt’s and Dulles’s aggressive stance. The oil dispute between the British and Mossadegh’s government escalated over the summer of 1951. On May 1, the Shah signed into law the Majlis’s March 15 resolution to revoke AIOC’s concession and form a new

company, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), in its place.<sup>23</sup> When Mossadegh named Iranian engineer Mehdi Bazargan as managing director of NIOC on June 20, effectively replacing AIOC's general manager, Eric Drake, the British responded by informing the U.S. government that they planned to occupy Iran's oil fields. In a June 20 Memorandum to Smith, Assistant Director of the CIA Office of National Estimates William Langer argued that executing this plan would likely "lead to the virtual collapse of the central government... In such a situation the Tudeh Party might be able to seize control of the central government."<sup>24</sup> In his opposition to the British proposal, Langer demonstrated his belief that an armed intervention would only fuel Tudeh's momentum, echoing the more cautious approach of the CIA as a whole.

### **Mossadegh's Popularity Increases**

Two months after Dulles called for Mossadegh's overthrow, the CIA decided to intervene in Iran, though it adopted a much subtler approach. The Agency established alliances with the Qashqai tribe of Southwestern Iran to facilitate the establishment of "drop zones, landing strips, sabotage targets, safe houses, and supply routes to and from the Persian Gulf."<sup>25</sup> The second initiative entailed efforts to mold the Qashqai into "an effective force in Iranian politics with which to oppose the Tudeh/Communists."<sup>26</sup> At least temporarily, the gradual intervention championed by the NSC, Langer, and the CIA Station in Iran took precedence over Roosevelt's and Dulles's calls for Mossadegh's forced removal.

Despite the CIA's tribal mobilization efforts, Tudeh influence in Iran continued to rise. A telegram sent to Washington from the CIA's Iran Station reported that over ten

thousand Iranians had attended a communist demonstration in Tehran in July 1951.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the country slid into economic turmoil as oil production ground to a halt following the British government's decision to recall all but 300 British nationals working at AIOC's Abadan refinery in response to Mossadegh's summer efforts to replace the company's leadership.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the financial hardship the British withdrawal wrought on Iranians, Mossadegh's domestic popularity only increased. In particular, moderates—who believed that renegotiating AIOC's concession represented a more viable policy option than revoking it altogether—came to support Mossadegh's desire to wrestle AIOC out of British hands completely due to the steadfast refusal of Prime Minister Clement Atlee and Foreign Minister Herbert Morrison to even entertain proposals to divide the company's profits more evenly.<sup>29</sup>

By October, the oil dispute had reached its climax. An October 12 telegram from the Iran Station to Washington stated that "Majlis opposition to Mosadeq collapsed on 30 September 1951," confirming the prime minister's surging popularity.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the telegram noted that, due to the continued intractability of the oil dispute, "the economic situation stands to deteriorate further, which paves the way for further increase[s] in the power of the Tudeh Party."<sup>31</sup> Despite this news, the U.S. government continued its policy of hoping for stability through Mossadegh's government. On November 28, Ambassador Loy Henderson wrote that he told George Middleton, the British Chargé d'Affaires, that he was "by no (rpt no) means sure it would be in our joint interest for [the] US at this juncture [to] join [the] UK in pressing [the] Shah to take steps to effect [a] change of govt."<sup>32</sup> Even in the midst of Iran's economic deterioration, the continued rise of Tudeh, and sustained British pressure to

support Mossadegh's deposition, the U.S. maintained its policy of eschewing direct intervention in the country.

In an act that represented the U.S. Administration's most aggressive overt action towards Iran since Mossadegh came to power, President Truman cut military and economic aid to the country in 1952.<sup>33</sup> Truman justified this move by claiming that Mossadegh had refused to comply with the 1951 Mutual Security Act, a law that prohibited providing military, economic, or technical assistance to any nation unless the President decided that such aid would strengthen U.S. national security and the recipient country accepted certain security obligations. Truman's decision to drastically reduce U.S. aid to Iran was risky; a February 4, 1952 National Intelligence Estimate revealed that the popularity Mossadegh enjoyed in late 1951 had eroded as the financial costs of the British abandonment of Abadan truly set in, providing Tudeh with ample opportunities to bolster its influence in the Iranian political sphere.<sup>34</sup>

Kermit Roosevelt revealed the political implications of Iran's economic deterioration in a memorandum written on April 5, a few days after the National Front's victory in the 1952 majlis elections. Roosevelt observed that "in spite of its poor showing in the recent elections, which were rigged throughout the country, the Tudeh Party has been gaining strength."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, "xenophobia in Iran is now being directed against the US since Washington's statement that no significant US economic aid would be granted [to] Iran prior to an oil settlement."<sup>36</sup> Roosevelt also warned that if the negative fallout of Truman's decision to back Britain by cutting aid to Iran continued, the U.S. government would have to prepare for previously-unthinkable consequences. Chief among these, for Roosevelt, was that the "CIA [may have] to undertake large-scale stay-behind

planning to meet contingencies such as a Tudeh coup or political fragmentation of Iran."<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt's mention of a "Tudeh coup" indicated the seriousness with which he took the rising communist threat and demonstrated his belief that the policy of mobilizing the Qashqai and ending aid to Iran had not paid dividends.

In contrast to Roosevelt, others at the CIA continued advocating for patience. Assistant Director of the Office of National Estimates Sherman Kent, for instance, viewed Iran's worsening economic and political situation positively. In a memorandum to Smith on June 24, he stated that "recent developments in Iran suggest that a financial crisis is imminent and may lead to the fall of Mosadeq... Opposition elements in the new Majlis blocked government efforts to dominate that body and are in a position to prevent the passage of emergency fiscal legislation that would enable the government to meet its obligation for a few more months."<sup>38</sup> For Kent, a weakened Mossadegh did not represent a cause for concern. Instead, fiscal developments in Iran represented evidence that Truman's decision to cut aid to Iran was paying dividends. This policy, combined with Iran's inability to export oil due to the British embargo, appeared to have hindered Mossadegh's nationalization agenda. This optimism was confirmed on July 14, 1952, when Mossadegh resigned after the Shah refused to approve his proposed cabinet for the 17<sup>th</sup> Majlis.<sup>39</sup> For people like Kent, the fact that Mossadegh's replacement, Ahmad Qavam, was pro-West and anti-nationalization further confirmed that waiting out Mossadegh had paid dividends.

Just as Truman, Kent, Henderson, Langer, and Smith felt vindicated by their patience, the unexpected happened. On July 21, Henderson reported that thousands of pro-nationalist rioters in Tehran "were milling thru [*sic*] the city streets, shouting

‘death to Brit [*sic*] and Amer [*sic*] imperialists, down with the Shah.’”<sup>40</sup> The next day, Qavam resigned and Mossadegh became prime minister again, his popularity restored.<sup>41</sup> Following Mossadegh’s resurgence, Dulles criticized the U.S. policy that he believed had enabled his return to power. In a July 29 meeting with Smith, he “cited a memorandum prepared by Mr. Kermit Roosevelt on our efforts to operate in the Qashqai region of Southern Iran, and noted that we were encountering difficulties in getting under way in this area.”<sup>42</sup> Smith added that “the Communist threat was considerably enhanced by Mosadeq’s present attitude and by the likelihood of a dramatic anti-western move.”<sup>43</sup> Despite recognizing the “Communist threat,” however, Smith still opposed overthrowing Mossadegh. The next day, he argued that “given the lack of a strong military figure around whom a coup might be engineered, the only real chance for forestalling Communist moves lay in a change in *dynasty* [emphasis added].”<sup>44</sup> Smith believed that removing the Shah himself was more likely to prevent communism’s spread in Iran than deposing Mossadegh, revealing the degree to which he disagreed with Dulles’s and Roosevelt’s repeated calls to overthrow the prime minister.

Notwithstanding the idea of removing the Shah, the CIA once again opted for a more cautious approach. On August 20, 1952, Deputy Director for Plans Frank Wisner informed Smith that “pursuant to your instructions of two weeks ago, the attached plan for arming Iranian tribal groups has been developed by the Near East Division.”<sup>45</sup> Although this newest iteration of the tribal mobilization plan represented a significant escalation from the CIA’s propaganda and political influence efforts of 1951, Wisner clarified that the policy was “an emergency plan which is for implementation only in case of the collapse or Communist

take-over of the Iranian central government.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, even this policy was precautionary in nature and lacked the aggressive intent that Dulles and Roosevelt had championed since March 1951.

### **An American Coup**

Despite Smith’s reservations over an offensive policy, which echoed those of Truman and the NSC, he authorized Roosevelt’s Near East and Africa Division to begin developing a plan to change the Iranian government by force in September 1952. According to John Leavitt, the Chief of the Iran Branch of the CIA’s Directorate of Plans, the plan, called the Thornburg Program, involved a “direct approach to the Shah for the purpose of inducing him to lead and carry out what in effect would be a military coup.”<sup>47</sup>

However, the Thornburg Program—whose strategy of convincing the Shah to dismiss Mossadegh became a central feature of the 1953 Coup—never progressed beyond the planning stage during Truman’s presidency. As the Truman Administration entered the lame duck period after Eisenhower won the 1952 presidential election, the British approached the Americans with another coup proposal.<sup>48</sup> Deputy Under Secretary of State H. Freeman Matthews rejected it, telling the British that the U.S. “would not want to dismiss the idea of a coup, but we did feel at least one more effort should be made to arrive at an oil settlement with Mosadeq.”<sup>49</sup> As a result, overthrowing Mossadegh only emerged as a palatable policy option after Eisenhower took office and Dulles became DCI. On March 1, 1953, newly-appointed DCI Dulles sent a memorandum to President Eisenhower about “The Iranian Situation.” He asserted:

Ever since the assassination of General Razmara in March 1951, and the

subsequent impasse and diplomatic break with Britain over the oil negotiations, the Iranian situation has been slowly disintegrating. The result has been a steady decrease in the power and influence of the Western democracies and the building up of a situation where a Communist takeover is becoming more and more of a possibility.<sup>50</sup>

In linking the possibility of “a Communist takeover” to “the assassination of General Razmara,” Dulles conveyed to Eisenhower his belief that Razmara’s death had left Iran devoid of a leader who could prevent the country from falling out of the West’s sphere of influence.

For Dulles, the only piece missing from a successful overthrow of Mossadegh was a suitable successor. On March 4, Dulles argued that if Mossadegh “were to be assassinated or otherwise to disappear from power, a political vacuum would occur in Iran and the Communists might easily take over.”<sup>51</sup> By the end of March, however, Dulles and Roosevelt had found the ideal candidates to prevent this “political vacuum” from occurring. On that day, a CIA Information Report stated that

anti-Mosadeq Majlis deputies and retired Army officers are planning a coup d’état ... those prominent in planning the coup are: Majlis Deputy Seyyed Abul Hasan Haerizadeh, General Nadr Batmangelitch, and retired Generals Abbas Garzan, Bahadori, and Fazollah Zahedi.<sup>52</sup>

In an April 4 memorandum, Roosevelt requested funds for “Special Operation TP AJAX,” revealing that the group of “anti-Mosadeq Majlis deputies and retired Army officers” were actually part of the CIA coup plan that would put Zahedi in power that August. Roosevelt wrote that the funds would be used “for the specific purpose agreed to,” and that the operation required “special security measures, and will be handled on ‘Eyes Alone’ basis.”<sup>53</sup>

Three months into his tenure as DCI, Dulles, in coordination with Roosevelt, thus set the wheels of Operation TP AJAX in motion. Roosevelt travelled to Iran to begin on-site preparations for the coup in July. By July 16, he had identified General Zahedi as the best candidate to succeed Mossadegh.<sup>54</sup> Twenty-five days later, Roosevelt convinced Mohammad Reza Shah to sign a royal decree dismissing Mossadegh from his post, lending the coup a veneer of legitimacy. By August 19, weeks of relentless CIA propaganda efforts to paint Mossadegh as a communist agent—combined with daily street protests instigated by Iranian mobsters on the Agency’s payroll that attracted citizens for whom the economic costs of the oil dispute had become unbearable—had plunged Tehran into a state of turmoil.<sup>55</sup> On the morning of August 19, thousands of protesters, many of whom had received 500 Iranian rials from Roosevelt and his co-conspirators to join the crowd for the day, gathered in the streets of Tehran shouting “death to Mosadeq! Long live the Shah!”<sup>56</sup>

Just before two o’clock, Iranian army officers dispatched by Roosevelt stormed the local radio station and announced that Zahedi would replace Mossadegh, according to the instructions laid out in the Shah’s decree. Following the broadcast, Roosevelt drove to retrieve General Zahedi from his safehouse. Perched on a tank, Zahedi followed the mob to Mossadegh’s home. There, a bloody street battle commenced between the rioters and the Mossadegh’s supporters, who tried, in vain, to defend the entrance of the prime minister’s home. Although Mossadegh managed to escape before his supporters’ resistance broke, he turned himself in to Zahedi a few days later. On August 20, CIA headquarters sent a telegram to Tehran “extending commendation and congratulations to all Tehran Station personnel. Kermit Roosevelt both in HQS and on scene of action has

distinguished himself and served US Govt and CIA well.”<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

This article examined the influential role that the unrelenting advocacy of DCI Allen Dulles and CIA Middle East Operative Kermit Roosevelt played in convincing President Dwight Eisenhower to approve Operation TP AJAX, the covert plot to overthrow Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. As DCI, Dulles finally enjoyed the influence to act on his and Roosevelt’s belief, held since Prime Minister Haj Ali Razmara’s 1951 assassination, that only direct action would bring about a stable outcome in Iran. The result, the 1953 Iran coup, reflected a turning point in American-Iranian relations and contributed to their permanent destabilization following the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah in 1979. In overthrowing Mossadegh and restoring the power of the Pahlavi monarchy, the CIA ousted a popular leader who believed passionately in a democratic future for his country, establishing a legacy of American support for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East that continues to this day.

More fundamentally, the rigid, Cold-War mindset that drove Roosevelt and Dulles to push for Mossadegh’s ouster from the day he took office precluded them from entertaining the possibility that the communist threat to Iran was overblown, and

that working with the prime minister might have strengthened U.S. national security interests. Indeed, a diplomat and two CIA agents who monitored Tudeh activity in the 1950s stated decades after the coup “that the Tudeh was really not very powerful, and that higher-level U.S. officials routinely exaggerated its strength and Mosadeq’s reliance on it.”<sup>58</sup> In this light, one of the lessons of the 1953 Iran Coup centers around the dangerous consequences associated with allowing a single frame of reference to dominate decision-making in international relations.

Despite the cautionary tale of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, during which demonstrators calling for Mohammad Reza Shah’s ouster bore portraits of Mossadegh as they marched through the streets of Tehran, it appears that the United States has not taken this lesson to heart with respect to its Middle East foreign policy. From Cairo to Riyadh, hegemonic justifications of security cooperation, countering terrorism, and maintaining political stability have replaced Roosevelt’s and Dulles’s single-dimensional, anti-communist motivation for bolstering despotic regimes across the region. Nevertheless, the tragic consequences of the 1953 Iran Coup live on today as policymakers in Washington continue to dictate that U.S. interests lie not in strengthening the will of the people, but rather in maintaining an authoritarian status quo.

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<sup>1</sup>Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 191.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 184–185.

<sup>3</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 184–185.

<sup>4</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 50–53, 55, 69–71.

<sup>5</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 50–53, 55, 69–71.

<sup>6</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 50, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 88.

<sup>8</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 265–266.

<sup>12</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> “Special Estimate,” March 16, 1951, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Retrospective Volume, Iran, 1951–1954* (Washington:

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United States Government Publishing Office, 2017) (hereafter *FRUS*), 42.

<sup>14</sup> “Memorandum from the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans (Roosevelt) to the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Dulles),” March 15, 1951, in *FRUS*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> “Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Dulles) to Director of Central Intelligence Smith,” March 28, 1951, in *FRUS*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> “Minutes of Director of Central Intelligence Smith’s Meeting,” May 9, 1951, in *FRUS*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> “Telegram From the Station in Iran to the Central Intelligence Agency,” May 6, 1951, in *FRUS*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> “Memorandum for the Record,” May 16, 1951, in *FRUS*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 91

<sup>24</sup> “Memorandum From the Assistant Director of the Office of National Estimates (Langer) to Director of Central Intelligence Smith,” June 20, 1951, in *FRUS*, 103.

<sup>25</sup> “Project Outline Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,” July 26, 1951, in *FRUS*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> “Project Outline Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,” Undated, in *FRUS*, 121.

<sup>27</sup> “Telegram From the Station in Iran to the Central Intelligence Agency,” October 12, 1951, in *FRUS*, 145, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 97, 108, 116.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 118.

<sup>30</sup> “Telegram From the Station in Iran to the Central Intelligence Agency,” October 12, 1951, in *FRUS*, 145, 147.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–148.

<sup>32</sup> “Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State,” November 28, 1951, in *FRUS*, 160.

<sup>33</sup> “Editorial Note,” in *FRUS*, 169.

<sup>34</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate,” February 4, 1952, in *FRUS*, 176.

<sup>35</sup> “Memorandum From the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans (Roosevelt) to the Chief of the Operations Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency ([name not declassified]),” April 5, 1952, in *FRUS*, 227.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>38</sup> “Memorandum From the Assistant Director of the Office of National Estimates (Kent) to Director of Central Intelligence Smith,” June 24, 1952, in *FRUS*, 260.

<sup>39</sup> “Editorial Note,” in *FRUS*, 261.

<sup>40</sup> “Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State,” July 21, 1952, in *FRUS*, 282.

<sup>41</sup> “Editorial Note,” in *FRUS*, 298.

<sup>42</sup> “Minutes of Director of Central Intelligence Smith’s Meeting,” July 29, 1952, in *FRUS*, 300.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>44</sup> “Minutes of Director of Central Intelligence Smith’s Meeting,” July 30, 1952, in *FRUS*, 302.

<sup>45</sup> “Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Plans (Wisner) to Director of Central Intelligence Smith,” August 20, 1952, in *FRUS*, 326.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>47</sup> “Memorandum from the Chief of the Iran Branch, Near East and Africa Division (Leavitt) to the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Roosevelt),” September 22, 1952, in *FRUS*, 351.

<sup>48</sup> “Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Byroade) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews),” November 26, 1952, in *FRUS*, 426.

<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” December 3, 1952, in *FRUS*, 431.

<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Dulles to President Eisenhower,” March 1, 1953, in *FRUS*, 472.

<sup>51</sup> “Memorandum of Discussion at the 135th Meeting of the National Security Council,” March 4, 1953, in *FRUS*, 481.

<sup>52</sup> “Information Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,” March 31, 1953, in *FRUS*, 517.

<sup>53</sup> “Memorandum From the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans (Roosevelt) to the Director of Central Intelligence (Dulles),” April 4, 1953, in *FRUS*, 519.

<sup>54</sup> “Memorandum from the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Roosevelt) to Mitchell,” July 16, 1953, in *FRUS*, 632.

<sup>55</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 6, 172–173.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 178–180, 187.

<sup>57</sup> “Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Iran,” August 20, 1953, in *FRUS*, 709.

<sup>58</sup> Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 206.