All the Shah's Men

An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror

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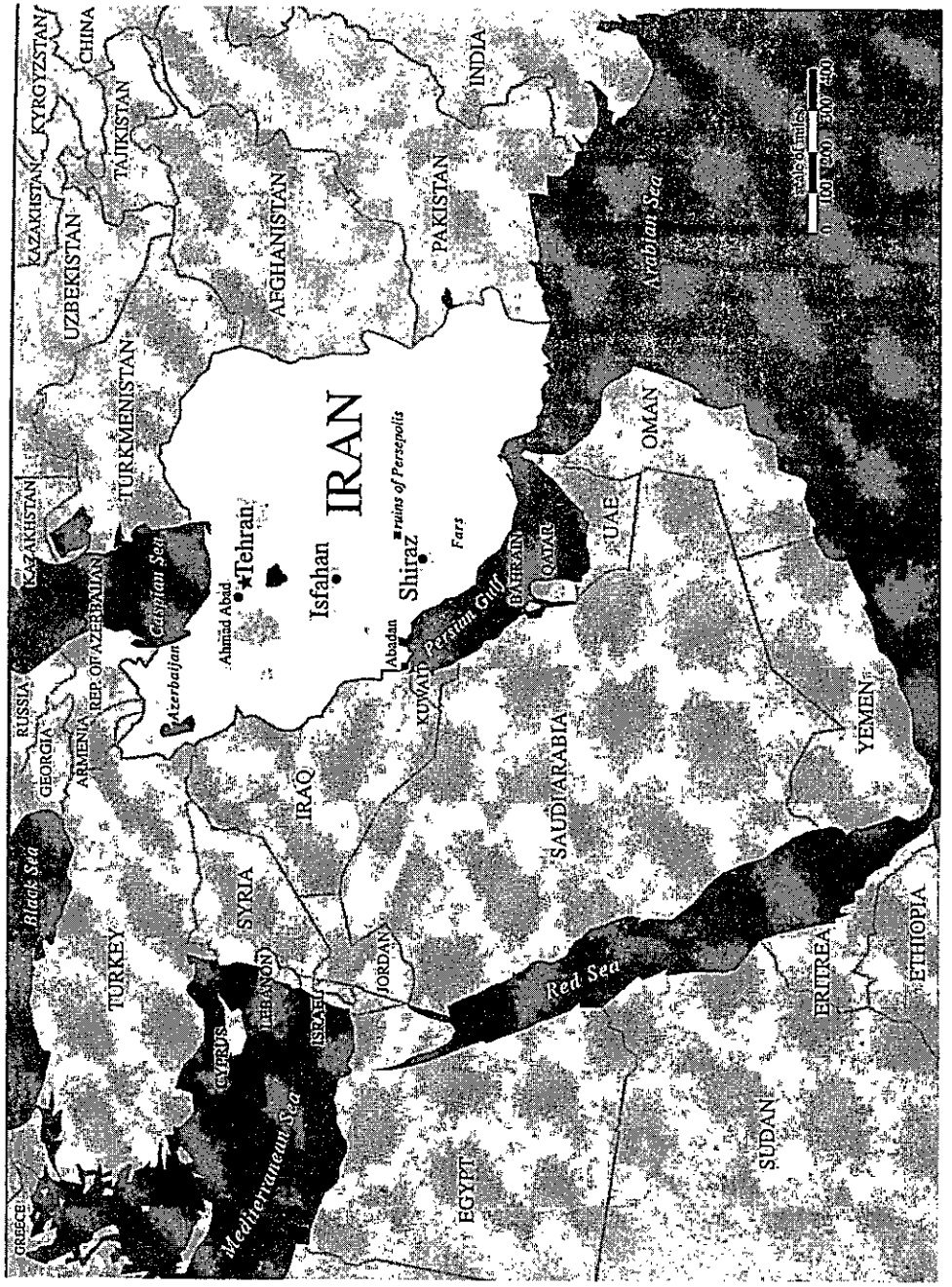
John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2003



MAP/JANE SIMON

CHAPTER 1

Good Evening, Mr. Roosevelt

Most of Tehran was asleep when an odd caravan set out through the darkness shortly before midnight on August 15, 1953. At its head was an armored car with military markings. Behind came two jeeps and several army trucks full of soldiers. The day had been exceptionally hot, but nightfall brought some relief. A crescent moon shone above. It was a fine night to overthrow a government.

Sitting in the lead car, Colonel Nematollah Nasiri, the commander of the Imperial Guard, had reason to be confident. In his pocket he carried a decree from the Shah of Iran dismissing Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh from office. Nasiri was on his way to present this decree to Mossadegh and arrest him if he resisted.

The American and British intelligence agents who plotted this rebellion assumed that Mossadegh would immediately call out the army to suppress it. They had arranged for no one to be on the other end of the phone when he called. Colonel Nasiri was to stop first at the home of the military chief of staff and arrest him, then move on to deliver the fateful decree.

The colonel did as he was told. When he arrived at his first stop, however, he found something most unusual. Despite the late hour,

the chief of staff, General Taqi Riahi, was not at home. Neither was anyone else. Not even a servant or a doorkeeper could be found.

This might have alerted Colonel Nasiri that something was amiss, but it did not. He simply climbed back into his armored car and ordered the driver to proceed toward his main objective, Prime Minister Mossadegh's home. With him rode the hopes of two elite intelligence agencies.

Colonel Nasiri would not have been foolhardy enough to attempt such a bold mission on his own. The decree he carried was of dubious legality, since in democratic Iran prime ministers could be installed or removed only with the permission of parliament. But this night's work was the culmination of months of planning by the Central Intelligence Agency and Britain's Secret Intelligence Service. The coup they were staging had been ordered by President Dwight Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

In 1953 the United States was still new to Iran. Many Iranians thought of Americans as friends, supporters of the fragile democracy they had spent half a century trying to build. It was Britain, not the United States, that they demonized as the colonialist oppressor that exploited them.

Since the early years of the twentieth century a British company, owned mainly by the British government, had enjoyed a fantastically lucrative monopoly on the production and sale of Iranian oil. The wealth that flowed from beneath Iran's soil played a decisive role in maintaining Britain at the pinnacle of world power while most Iranians lived in poverty. Iranians chafed bitterly under this injustice. Finally, in 1951, they turned to Mossadegh, who more than any other political leader personified their anger at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). He pledged to throw the company out of Iran, reclaim the country's vast petroleum reserves, and free Iran from subjection to foreign power.

Prime Minister Mossadegh carried out his pledges with single-minded zeal. To the ecstatic cheers of his people, he nationalized Anglo-Iranian, the most profitable British business in the world. Soon afterward, Iranians took control of the company's giant refinery at Abadan on the Persian Gulf.

That sent Iran into patriotic ecstasy and made Mossadegh a national hero. It also outraged the British, who indignantly accused Mossadegh of stealing their property. They first demanded that the

World Court and the United Nations punish him, then sent warships to the Persian Gulf, and finally imposed a crushing embargo that devastated Iran's economy. Despite this campaign, many Iranians were thrilled with Mossadegh's boldness. So were anticolonial leaders across Asia and Africa.

Mossadegh was utterly unmoved by Britain's campaign against him. One European newspaper reported that Mossadegh "would rather be fried in Persian oil than make the slightest concession to the British." For a time the British considered launching an armed invasion to retake the oil fields and refinery, but they dropped the idea after President Harry Truman refused his support. Only two options remained: leave Mossadegh in power or organize a coup to depose him. Prime Minister Churchill, a proud product of the imperial tradition, had no trouble deciding for the coup.

British agents began conspiring to overthrow Mossadegh soon after he nationalized the oil company. They were too eager and aggressive for their own good. Mossadegh learned of their plotting, and in October 1952 he ordered the British embassy shut. All British diplomats in Iran, including clandestine agents working under diplomatic cover, had to leave the country. No one was left to stage the coup.

Immediately, the British asked President Truman for help. Truman, however, sympathized viscerally with nationalist movements like the one Mossadegh led. He had nothing but contempt for old-style imperialists like those who ran Anglo-Iranian. Besides, the CIA had never overthrown a government, and Truman did not wish to set the precedent.

The American attitude toward a possible coup in Iran changed radically after Dwight Eisenhower was elected president in November 1952. Within days of the election, a senior agent of the Secret Intelligence Service, Christopher Montague Woodhouse, came to Washington for meetings with top CIA and State Department officials. Woodhouse shrewdly decided not to make the traditional British argument, which was that Mossadegh must go because he had 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."

This appeal was calculated to stir the two brothers who would direct American foreign policy after Eisenhower's inauguration. John Foster Dulles, the incoming secretary of state, and Allen Dulles, the incoming CIA director, were among the fiercest of Cold Warriors. They viewed the world as an ideological battleground and saw every local conflict through the prism of the great East-West confrontation. In their eyes, any country not decisively allied with the United States was a potential enemy. They considered Iran especially dangerous.

Iran had immense oil wealth, a long border with the Soviet Union, an active Communist party, and a nationalist prime minister. The Dulles brothers believed there was a serious danger that it would soon fall to communism. The prospect of such a "second China" terrified them. When the British presented their proposal to overthrow Mossadegh and replace him with a reliably pro-Western prime minister, they were immediately interested.

Soon after President Eisenhower took office on January 20, 1953, John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles told their British counterparts that they were ready to move against Mossadegh. Their coup would be code-named Operation Ajax, or, in CIA jargon, TPAJAX. To direct it, they chose a CIA officer with considerable experience in the Middle East, Kermit Roosevelt, a grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Like other members of his famous family, Kermit Roosevelt had a penchant for direct action and was known to be decisive in times of crisis. He was thirty-seven years old, chief of the CIA's Near East and Asia Division, and an acknowledged master of his clandestine trade. The Soviet agent Kim Philby described him as the quintessential quiet American, "a courteous, soft-spoken Easterner with impeccable social connections, well-educated rather than intellectual, pleasant and unassuming as host and guest. An especially nice wife. In fact, the last person you would expect to be up to the neck in dirty tricks."

CIA agents in those days shared a profound idealism, a conviction that they were doing the vital dirty work of freedom. Many combined the best qualities of the thinker and the adventurer. None epitomized that combination more fully than did Kermit Roosevelt.

At the beginning of July, ignoring a CIA doctor's order that he first submit to urgent kidney surgery, he flew off on his secret mission. He landed in Beirut and from there set out by car across the deserts of Syria and Iraq. As he entered Iran at a remote crossing, he could barely contain his excitement:

> I remembered what my father wrote of his arrival in Africa with *his* father, T. R., in 1909 on the *African Game Trails* trip. "It was a great adventure, and all the world was young!" I felt as he must have felt then. My nerves tingled, my spirits soared as we moved up the mountain road. . . . As it turned out, on July 19, 1953, we encountered an unusually listless, stupid and semi-literate immigration/customs fellow at Khanequin. In those days US passports carried, as they do not now, some brief description of any notable features of the holder. With encouragement and help from me, the guard laboriously transcribed my name as "Mr. Scar on Right Forehead." This I found a good omen.

Roosevelt spent his first two weeks in Tehran conducting business from a villa rented by one of his American agents. Decades of British intrigue in Iran, coupled with more recent work by the CIA, gave him excellent assets on the ground. Among them were a handful of experienced and highly resourceful Iranian operatives who had spent years assembling a clandestine network of sympathetic politicians, military officers, clergymen, newspaper editors, and street gang leaders. The CIA was paying these operatives tens of thousands of dollars per month, and they earned every cent. During the spring and summer of 1953, not a day passed without at least one CIA-subsidized mullah, news commentator, or politician denouncing Prime Minister Mossadegh. The prime minister, who had great respect for the sanctity of free press, refused to suppress this campaign.

Iranian agents who came in and out of Roosevelt's villa knew him only by his pseudonym, James Lockridge. As time passed, they naturally developed a sense of comradeship, and some of the Iranians, much to Roosevelt's amusement, began calling him "Jim." The only times he came close to blowing his cover were during tennis games that he played regularly at the Turkish embassy and on the campus of the French Institute. When he missed a shot, he would curse himself, shouting, "Oh, *Roosevelt!*" Several times he was asked

why someone named Lockridge would have developed such a habit. He replied that he was a passionate Republican and considered Franklin D. Roosevelt to have been so evil that he used Roosevelt's name as a curse.

The plan for Operation Ajax envisioned an intense psychological campaign against Prime Minister Mossadegh, which the CIA had already launched, followed by an announcement that the Shah had dismissed him from office. Mobs and military units whose leaders were on the CIA payroll would crush any attempt by Mossadegh to resist. Then it would be announced that the Shah had chosen General Fazlollah Zahedi, a retired military officer who had received more than $100,000 from the CIA, as Iran's new prime minister.

By the beginning of August, Tehran was afire. Mobs working for the CIA staged anti-Mossadegh protests, marching through the streets carrying portraits of the Shah and chanting royalist slogans. Foreign agents bribed members of parliament and anyone else who might be helpful in the forthcoming coup attempt.

Press attacks on Mossadegh reached new levels of virulence. Articles accused him not just of communist leanings and designs on the throne, but also of Jewish parentage and even secret sympathy for the British. Although Mossadegh did not know it, most of these tirades were either inspired by the CIA or written by CIA propagandists in Washington. One of the propagandists, Richard Cottam, estimated that four-fifths of the newspapers in Tehran were under CIA influence.

"Any article that I would write—it gave you something of a sense of power—would appear almost instantly, the next day, in the Iranian press," Cottam recalled years later. "They were designed to show Mossadegh as a Communist collaborator and as a fanatic."

As the plot gathered momentum, Roosevelt faced his most serious obstacle, Mohammad Reza Shah. The thirty-two-year-old monarch, only the second shah in the Pahlavi line, was timid and indecisive by nature, and he doggedly refused to be drawn into such an audacious plot. "He hates taking decisions and cannot be relied on to stick to them when taken," one British diplomat reported. "He has no moral courage and succumbs easily to fear."

More than personality traits held the Shah back. Mossadegh had been the most popular figure in modern Iranian history, and although Britain's campaign of subversion and economic sabotage had weakened him, he was still widely admired and beloved. It was not even clear that the Shah had the legal authority to remove him. The plot could easily backfire and endanger not only the Shah's life but the monarchy itself.

None of this daunted Roosevelt. To carry out his coup, he needed signed decrees from the Shah dismissing Mossadegh and naming General Zahedi in his place. Roosevelt never doubted that he would ultimately obtain them. His battle of wits with the Shah was unequal from the start. Roosevelt was clever and well trained, and behind him lay immense international power. The Shah was weak, immature, and alone.

Roosevelt's first gambit was to send emissaries who might have special influence over the Shah. First he arranged for the Shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf, who was as sharp and combative as the Shah was dull, to visit her brother and try to stiffen his backbone. Ashraf's tongue-lashings of her brother were legendary, including one in the presence of foreign diplomats when she demanded that he prove he was a man or else be revealed to all as a mouse. She detested Mossadegh because he was an enemy of royal power. Her attacks on his government became so bitter that the Shah had felt it best to send her out of the country. From her golden exile in Europe, she watched events in her homeland with undiminished passion.

Ashraf was enjoying life in French casinos and nightclubs when one of Roosevelt's best Iranian agents, Asadollah Rashidian, paid her a call. He found her reluctant, so the next day a delegation of American and British agents came to pose the invitation in stronger terms. The leader of the delegation, a senior British operative named Norman Darbyshire, had the foresight to bring a mink coat and a packet of cash. When Ashraf saw these emoluments, Darbyshire later recalled, "her eyes lit up" and her resistance crumbled. She agreed to fly to Tehran and landed without incident under her married name, Madame Chafik. At first her brother refused to receive her, but after being not so subtly urged to change his mind by associates who were in touch with the CIA, he relented. Brother and sister met late on the evening of July 29. Their meeting was

tense. She failed to persuade him to issue the crucial decrees, and to make matters worse, news of her presence leaked out and set off a storm of protest. To everyone's relief, she quickly returned to Europe.

Next Roosevelt turned to General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who had spent most of the 1940s in Iran leading an elite military regiment and to whom the Shah felt deeply indebted. The CIA gave Schwarzkopf a "cover mission" of meetings and inspections in Lebanon, Pakistan, and Egypt so that his visit to Iran could be explained as a simple stopover. According to one account, he arrived there carrying "a couple of large bags" into which were stuffed several million dollars in cash. He met first with Roosevelt and then with Iranian principals in the operation, to whom he distributed much money. On the first day of August he called on the Shah at Saad Abad Palace.

It was a bizarre encounter. At first the Shah refused to say a word to his guest, indicating with gestures that he suspected hidden microphones. Then he led Schwarzkopf into a large ballroom, pulled a table into the center of the room, sat down on top of it, and invited the general to join him. There he whispered that he had still not decided whether to sign the decrees Roosevelt wanted. He doubted that the army would obey any order he signed, and he did not want to be on the losing side in such a risky operation.

Even as Schwarzkopf listened, he sensed the Shah's resistance weakening. One more visitor might be enough to bring the desired result, but it would have to be Roosevelt himself. This was a dangerous proposition. If Roosevelt was seen at the palace, news of his presence in Iran might leak out and compromise the entire operation. Schwarzkopf, however, told him there was no alternative.

Roosevelt expected this advice. "I had been sure from the beginning that a personal meeting would be necessary," he wrote afterward. "Securely and alone, the Shah and I could resolve the many difficult problems confronting us. This could only be done on a person-to-person basis. In all likelihood we would have to meet not once but several times. So the sooner we got to it, the better."

To prepare the way for his visit, Roosevelt sent his trusted agent Assadollah Rashidian to see the Shah on August 2. Rashidian's message was simple: the British and the Americans were planning a coup and would not be deterred. Under these circumstances, Rashidian observed tartly, the Shah had little choice but to cooperate. The Shah nodded in silent agreement.

Only Roosevelt, however, could close the deal. He asked an agent in the royal court who was known by the code name Rosenkrantz to approach the Shah and say that "an American authorized to speak for Eisenhower *and* Churchill desired a secret audience." In a matter of hours the overture was made, and the Shah accepted it. He would send a car to Roosevelt's villa that night at midnight.

"Two hours to wait!" Roosevelt thought to himself after receiving the message. "I considered my costume. If not appropriate for a royal audience, it did seem good for these rather peculiar circumstances. I had on a dark turtleneck shirt, Oxford-gray slacks, and a pair of black-topped *givehs*, rope-soled cloth-covered Persian footwear somewhere between shoes and bedroom slippers. Not exactly smart but suitably unobtrusive."

Roosevelt, who had interviewed the Shah six years earlier while researching a book called *Arabs, Oil and History* and had met him again during subsequent visits to Iran, waited for the appointed hour with a handful of his agents. He thought it best not to drink, though his comrades had no such scruples. When midnight finally came, he walked through the front gate and out onto the street. A car was waiting. He climbed into the back seat.

Nothing stirred on the streets as Roosevelt was driven toward the stately palace. As his car began to climb the hill on which the palace sits, he decided that he should duck out of sight. His hosts had thoughtfully left a folded blanket on the car seat, and he put it to good use, lying down on the floor and pulling it over him.

There was no trouble at the sentry's gate, just a perfunctory wave. The car continued on for a few moments and then pulled to a stop well short of the palace's broad limestone steps. Roosevelt pulled off his blanket and sat up. A slim figure was walking down the steps toward him. The man, whom he recognized immediately as the Shah, approached his car, opened the door, and slid in beside him. Discreetly, the driver withdrew into the shadows.

"Good evening, Mr. Roosevelt," the monarch said, extending his hand. "I cannot say that I expected to see you, but this is a pleasure."

Roosevelt told the Shah that he was in Iran on behalf of the American and British secret services, and that this would be confirmed by a code word the Shah would be able to hear on the BBC

the next night. Churchill had arranged that the BBC would end its broadcast day by saying not "It is now midnight," as usual, but "It is now *exactly* midnight." Such assurances were hardly necessary, the Shah replied. The two men understood each other.

Still, however, the Shah was hesitant to join the plot. He was no adventurer, he told Roosevelt, and could not take the chances of one. Roosevelt's tone sharpened. He told the Shah that leaving Mossadegh in power would "lead only to a Communist Iran or to a second Korea," which Western leaders were not prepared to accept. To avoid it, they had approved a plot to overthrow Mossadegh—and, incidentally, to increase the power of the Shah. He must embrace it within a few days; if he refused, Roosevelt would leave the country and devise "some other plan."

The Shah made no direct reply. Let them meet again the following night, he suggested. Then he turned to open the car door. Before stepping out into the darkness, he looked back at Roosevelt and said, "I am glad to welcome you once again to my country."

From then on, Roosevelt met with the Shah almost every midnight, entering the palace compound under the same blanket in the back seat of the same car. Before and after each session, he conferred with his Iranian operatives. When local police became suspicious of the villa he was using, he stopped conducting business there and devised another way to hold his conferences. He obtained a Tehran taxi, and at appointed times he would drive it to a quiet corner, always with the "On Call" sign showing. There he would park and begin walking until one or another of his agents, usually hyperactive and pumped on the adrenaline of the operation, picked him up in a Chrysler or a Buick. They planned their day-to-day tactics while careening through the hilly outskirts of town.

In his conversations with the Shah, Roosevelt said he had at his disposal "the equivalent of about $1 million" and several "extremely competent, professional organizers" who could "distribute pamphlets, organize mobs, keep track of the opposition—you name it, they'll do it." He described Operation Ajax as based on "four lines of attack." First, a campaign in mosques, the press, and the streets would undermine Mossadegh's popularity. Second, royalist military officers would deliver the decree dismissing him. Third, mobs would take control of the streets. Fourth, General Zahedi would emerge triumphantly and accept the Shah's nomination as prime minister.

It was an appealing but not entirely convincing plan, and the Shah continued to agonize. His mood turned to what Roosevelt called "stubborn irresolution." But it was "hopeless to proceed without the Shah," Roosevelt cabled to his CIA superiors, so he continued turning up the pressure. Finally, inevitably, the Shah's resistance broke. He agreed to sign the *firmans*, as the royal decrees were called, but only on condition that he be allowed to leave Tehran for some safer place immediately afterward.

Mohammad Reza Shah had never been known as a courageous man, so this latest show of prudence did not surprise Roosevelt. The two men decided that the safest place for the Shah to hide was a hunting lodge that the royal family maintained near Ramsar on the Caspian coast. There was an airstrip nearby, which the Shah found reassuring.

"If by any horrible chance things go wrong," he indelicately told Roosevelt, "the Empress and I will take our plane straight to Baghdad."

The two men met for the last time in the predawn of August 9. Before bidding the Shah farewell, Roosevelt felt it correct to thank him for his decision to cooperate, reluctant though it had been. This was a historic moment, and something beyond the ordinary was appropriate. Roosevelt came up with a wonderful way to embellish his message.

"Your Majesty, I received earlier this evening a cable from Washington," he prevaricated. "President Eisenhower had asked that I convey to you this word: 'I wish Your Imperial Majesty godspeed. If the Pahlavis and the Roosevelts working together cannot solve this little problem, then there is no hope anywhere. I have complete faith that you will get this done.'"

It was agreed that a CIA courier would bring the vital *firmans* to the palace early the next morning. The Shah would sign them and then fly immediately to his refuge at Ramsar. All seemed perfectly arranged.

When Roosevelt returned to his villa with the good news, he and his agents celebrated with an exuberant drinking binge. He finally made it to bed at five o'clock. A few hours later he was awakened by the cursing of an aide. There had been a last-minute failure. The courier who was to obtain the Shah's signature had turned up late at the palace. When he arrived, the royal couple was gone.

Whether this was a simple missed connection or a last-minute attempt by the Shah to run from signing the *firmans*, Roosevelt was determined that it not be allowed to upset his plan. These *firmans* played an indispensable role in the coup he had designed. They provided not just a fig leaf of legality but the operation's central organizing principle. If the Shah was not in Tehran to sign them, they would have to be brought to wherever he was.

The man best equipped to help at this moment, Roosevelt quickly realized, was Colonel Nasiri of the Imperial Guard. He was a strong royalist, could find and fly a plane, and was on intimate terms with the Shah. The arrangements were quickly made, and this time the connection worked. Nasiri flew to Ramsar, obtained the Shah's scribbled signature on both *firmans*, and then, because bad weather prevented him from taking off, sent them to Tehran by car.

Roosevelt and his comrades spent the day waiting impatiently around their pool, with no idea of what was taking Nasiri so long. When night fell, they took to smoking, playing cards, and drinking vodka with lime. Tehran was under a nine o'clock curfew, but after that hour passed, they still hoped someone would turn up. It was almost midnight when they heard shouts at the gate. They ran to open it. Outside was a small throng of unshaven and very excited Iranians, most of whom they did not recognize. They pushed a packet to Roosevelt, who opened it gingerly. Inside were the two *firmans*, duly signed by His Imperial Majesty.

After jubilantly embracing his new friends, Roosevelt considered how quickly he could now move. He was much dismayed when his agents told him there would have to be one more delay. The weekend, which Iranians observe on Thursday and Friday, was about to begin, and Iranians do not like to conduct business, much less overthrow governments, on weekends. Roosevelt reluctantly agreed to postpone the coup until Saturday night, August 15.

Confident of their plan but acutely aware that each passing hour increased the chance of betrayal, Roosevelt and his comrades spent three excruciating days at poolside. Saturday was the hardest to bear because the moment of truth was so near. Roosevelt later wrote that on that day, time moved "more slowly than anything we had ever before lived through."

By now Roosevelt had moved his command post to a basement

in the American embassy compound. His Iranian agents visited him less frequently, but they were busier than ever at their subversive work, as a CIA report on the coup makes clear:

> At this same time the psychological campaign against Mossadegh was reaching its climax. The controllable press was going all out against Mossadegh, while [DELETED] under station direction was printing material which the station considered to be helpful. CIA agents gave serious attention to alarming the religious leaders at Tehran by issuing black propaganda in the name of the [Communist] Tudeh party, threatening these leaders with savage punishment if they opposed Mossadegh. Threatening phone calls were also made to them, in the name of the Tudeh, and one of several sham bombings of the houses of these leaders was carried out.
>
> The word that the Shah would support direct action in his behalf spread rapidly through the "colonel's conspiracy" fostered by the station. Zahedi saw station principal agent, Colonel [DELETED], and named him as liaison officer with the Americans and as his choice to supervise the staff planning for the action. . . .
>
> On 14 August the station cabled that upon the conclusion of TPAJAX the Zahedi government, in view of the empty treasury of the country, would be in urgent need of funds. The sum of $5,000,000 was suggested, and CIA was asked to produce this sum almost within hours after the conclusion of the operation.

Now, in the words of that CIA report, "there was nothing that either the station or Headquarters could do except wait for action to begin." When dusk finally began falling over Tehran on August 15, Roosevelt climbed into his Hillman-Minx taxi, flipped down the "On Call" sign, and drove to a nearby safe house where his agents had gathered to await the news of victory. As vodka flowed, they sang along with records of Broadway show tunes. Their favorite was "Luck Be a Lady Tonight" from the musical *Guys and Dolls*. By acclimation, they adopted it as the official Operation Ajax theme song:

> They call you lady luck, but there is room for doubt;
> At times you have a very un-ladylike way of running out.
> You're on this date with me, the pickings have been lush,
> And yet before the evening is over you might give me the brush.

You might forget your manners, you might refuse to stay
And so the best that I can do is pray:
Luck, be a lady tonight.

As Roosevelt drove back to the American embassy later that evening, his route took him past the residence of General Riahi, the military chief of staff. He enjoyed the coincidence. If his plan worked, General Riahi would be behind bars in a few hours.

The officer Roosevelt had chosen to arrest the chief of staff and the prime minister that night, Colonel Nasiri, seemed ideal for the operation. He believed in the primacy of royal power and loathed Mossadegh. His command of the seven-hundred-man Imperial Guard gave him control of considerable resources. By successfully obtaining the vital *firmans* at a crucial moment, he seemed to have proven his reliability.

On the night of August 15, however, Nasiri was not thinking clearly enough. It was well after eleven o'clock when he arrived at General Riahi's home and found it abandoned. He was untroubled and simply ordered his men to proceed toward Mossadegh's residence. Unbeknownst to him, another military column was also on its way there. General Riahi had learned of the coup and sent troops to foil it.

The precise identity of the informant has never been established. Most guesses center on a military officer who belonged to a secret communist cell. There may have been more than one informant. In the end, what happened was precisely what Roosevelt feared. Too many people knew about the plot for too long. A leak was all but inevitable.

In the confusing hours around midnight, Tehran was bursting with plots and counterplots. Some rebellious officers learned of the betrayal in time to abort their missions. Others, not realizing that they were compromised, went ahead. One seized the telephone office at the bazaar. Another roused Foreign Minister Hussein Fatemi from bed and dragged him away barefoot and shouting.

The future of constitutional rule in Iran depended on which column of soldiers reached Mossadegh's house first. Shortly before one o'clock in the morning, the rebel column drove up Kakh Street, passed the corner of Heshmatdowleh, and stopped. Here Mossadegh lived with his wife in a small apartment, part of a larger

complex that his family had owned for many years. The gate was closed. Colonel Nasiri stepped out to demand entry. In his hand he held the *firman* dismissing Mossadegh from office. Behind him stood several files of soldiers.

Colonel Nasiri had arrived too late. Moments after he appeared at the gate, several loyal commanders stepped from the shadows. They escorted him into a jeep and drove him to general staff headquarters. There General Riahi denounced him as a traitor, ordered him stripped of his uniform, and sent him to a cell. The man who was to have arrested Mossadegh was now himself a prisoner.

Roosevelt, who had no way of knowing that any of this was happening, was at his embassy command post, waiting for Colonel Nasiri to call. Tanks clattered by several times, but the telephone never rang. Roosevelt's apprehensions deepened as dawn broke. Radio Tehran did not begin its transmissions at six o'clock as normal. Then, an hour later, it crackled to life with a burst of military music, followed by the reading of an official communiqué. Roosevelt did not speak Persian but feared the worst when he heard the announcer use the word *Mossadegh*. Then Mossadegh himself came on the air, announcing victory over a coup attempt organized by the Shah and "foreign elements."

The Shah, cowering at his seaside villa, was also listening. As soon as he grasped what had happened, he roused his wife and told her it was time to run. They quickly packed two small briefcases, grabbed what clothes they could carry in their arms, and walked briskly out toward their twin-engine Beechcraft. The Shah, a trained pilot, took the controls and set a course for Baghdad. After arriving there, he told the American ambassador that he "would be looking for work shortly as he has a large family and very small means outside of Iran."

While the Shah was fleeing, military units loyal to the government were fanning out through Tehran. City life quickly returned to normal. Several conspirators were arrested and others went into hiding. A reward was offered for the capture of General Zahedi. CIA operatives made mad dashes back to the security of the American embassy or safe houses. Jubilant crowds took to the streets chanting, "Victory to the Nation!" and "Mossadegh Has Won!"

Inside his embassy compound, Roosevelt felt himself "close to despair." He had no choice but to send a cable to Washington saying

that things had gone terribly wrong. John Waller, the head of the CIA's Iran desk, read it with great disappointment. Waller feared for the lives of his agents, and he sent Roosevelt an urgent reply. No copy of it is known to exist. According to CIA lore, it was an order that Roosevelt leave Iran immediately. Many years later, though, Waller said that it was not so categorical. Its message, he recalled, was: "If you're in a jam, get out so you don't get killed. But if you're not in a jam, go ahead and do what you have to do."

Things looked bleak for the plotters. They had lost the advantage of surprise. Several of their key agents were out of action. Their anointed prime minister, General Zahedi, was in hiding. The Shah had fled. Foreign Minister Fatemi, free after several hours in rebel custody, was making fiery speeches denouncing the Shah for his collaboration with foreign agents.

"O Traitor!" Fatemi railed before one crowd. "The moment you heard by Tehran Radio that your foreign plot had been defeated, you fled to the nearest country where Britain has an embassy!"

Operation Ajax had failed. Radio Tehran reported that the situation was "well under control," and so it seemed. Shock waves reverberated through CIA headquarters in Washington.

Then suddenly, around midevening, Roosevelt cabled a most unexpected message. He had decided to stay in Tehran and improvise another stab at Mossadegh. The CIA had sent him to overthrow the government of Iran, and he was determined not to leave until he had done it.

CHAPTER 2

Curse This Fate

Rising dramatically from the desert of southern Iran, with distant mountains adding to the majesty of the scene, the spectacular ruins of Persepolis testify to the grandeur that was Persia. This was the ceremonial and spiritual capital of a vast empire, built by Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, titans whose names still echo through history. Giant statues of winged bulls guard the Gate of All Nations, through which princes from vassal states passed once each year to pay homage to their Persian masters. The great Apadana, or Hall of Audience, where these princes knelt together before their dead sovereign, was the length of three football fields. Its roof was supported by thirty-six towering columns, some of which still stand. Two monumental staircases leading up to the hall are decorated with intricately detailed carvings depicting the annual ritual of obedience, which was held on the day of the vernal equinox. Today they offer a vivid picture of how completely Persian emperors once dominated the richest lands on earth.

The carvings show rulers of subject states filing past their supreme leader, each bearing gifts symbolizing the wealth of his province. Archaeologists have managed to identify most of them, and the very names of their cultures evoke the richness of antiquity.

CHAPTER 3

The Last Drop of the Nation's Blood

Democracy dawned in Iran one day in December 1891, when the Shah's wives put aside their water pipes and vowed to smoke no more. It was no easy sacrifice. Tobacco was one of the great pleasures of harem life, and beauteous odalisques spent hours each day smoking it while reclining on lush divans. By renouncing it, they were defying the Shah, the institution of absolute monarchy, and the imperial system by which most of the world was ruled.

By the time the harem women took their fateful step, their husband, Nasir al-Din Shah, had been on the Peacock Throne for more than forty years. Like other Qajar rulers, he was famous for his excesses. His harem, where he spent much of his time, grew to sixteen hundred wives, concubines, and eunuchs. He fathered hundreds of princes, all of whom had free access to the national treasury. Garish clusters of jewels decorated his palaces. When he became bored by the pleasures of home, he would set out for Europe accompanied by a huge entourage. He demanded to be called not only Shah of Shahs but also Asylum of the Universe, Subduer of Climate, Arbitrator of His People, Guardian of the Flock, Conqueror of Lands, and Shadow of God on Earth. Those who refused to honor

him were flogged, shot from cannons, buried alive, or set afire in public squares.

To support his lavish tastes, Nasir al-Din Shah sold government jobs, imposed oppressive taxes, and confiscated the fortunes of wealthy merchants. When there was no money left for him to take, he came up with the idea of raising cash by selling Iran's patrimony to foreign companies and governments. The British were his first customers. British officials were worried by native uprisings in India and wanted a telegraph line to their command posts there. In 1857 they bought a concession to build one across Iran. French, German, and Austrian groups bought a variety of other concessions. A German-born British subject, Baron Julius de Reuter, of news agency fame, won the most breathtaking one of all. In 1872, for a paltry sum and a promise of future royalties, he acquired the exclusive right to run the country's industries, irrigate its farmland, exploit its mineral resources, develop its railroad and streetcar lines, establish its national bank, and print its currency. Lord Curzon described this as "the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamt of, much less accomplished, in history."

Many were angered by the extreme one-sidedness of the Reuter concession. Iranian patriots, of whom there were already quite a number, were naturally outraged. So were merchants and businessmen who saw their opportunities suddenly snatched away from them. Clerics feared for their status in a country so fully dominated by foreign interests. Russia, Iran's most powerful neighbor, was alarmed to see a British concern take so much power just across its southern border. Even the British government, which Reuter had not consulted in negotiating the concession, doubted its wisdom. Finally, Nasir al-Din Shah realized that he had overstepped the limits of the possible, and he revoked the concession less than a year after granting it.

The Shah's greed, however, did not allow him to abandon the idea of selling concessions. Over the next few years he sold three to British consortiums. One bought the mineral-prospecting rights that had briefly belonged to Reuter, another the exclusive right to establish banks, and a third the exclusive right to commerce along the Karun River, the only navigable waterway in Iran. Russia

protested but was placated when the Shah sold Russian merchants the exclusive right to his caviar fisheries. Through these and other concessions, control over the nation's most valuable assets passed from the hands of Iranians to those of foreigners. The money they brought into the Iranian treasury sustained the Shah's lavish court for a while, but then, inevitably, it ran out. He raised more by borrowing from British and Russian banks.

As Iran sank ever deeper into the mire of poverty and dependence, a thirst for change gripped the population. Bazaars in large cities became hotbeds of protest. Religious reformers, Freemasons, and even socialists began spreading new and radical ideas. News about struggles for constitutional rule in Europe and the Ottoman Empire roused the literate classes. Provocative articles, books, and leaflets began to circulate.

Nasir al-Din Shah, isolated in the private world of the Qajar court, was oblivious to this rising discontent. In 1891 he sold the Iranian tobacco industry for the sum of £15,000. Under the terms of the concession, every farmer who grew tobacco was required to sell it to the British Imperial Tobacco Company, and every smoker had to buy it at a shop that was part of British Imperial's retail network.

Iran was then, as it is today, both an agricultural country and a country of smokers. Many thousands of poor farmers across the country grew tobacco on small plots; a whole class of middlemen cut, dried, packaged, and distributed it; and countless Iranians smoked it. That this native product would now be taken from the people who produced it and turned into a tool for the exclusive profit of foreigners proved too great an insult. A coalition of intellectuals, farmers, merchants, and clerics, such as had never before been seen in Iran, resolved to resist. The country's leading religious figure, Sheik Shirazi, endorsed their protest. In a shattering act of rebellion, he endorsed a *fatwa,* or religious order, declaring that as long as foreigners controlled the tobacco industry, smoking would constitute defiance of the Twelfth Imam, "may God hasten his appearance." News of his order flashed across the country through telegraph wires the British had built several decades earlier. Almost all who heard it obeyed. Nasir al-Din Shah was bewildered, frightened, and then overwhelmed by the unanimity of the protest. When his own wives stopped smoking, he realized that he had no choice but to cancel the concession. To add to the indignity, he had to borrow half a million pounds from a British bank to compensate British Imperial for its loss.

History changes course when people realize there is an alternative to blind obedience. Martin Luther's challenge to established Christianity, the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution, and the Boston Tea Party were such moments. For Iran, the beginning of the end of absolutism came with the Tobacco Revolt. It ushered in a new political age. No longer would Iranians remain passive while the Qajar dynasty oppressed them and sold their nation's patrimony to foreigners.

After several years during which he drifted ever further from his royal duties and from reality itself, Nasir al-Din Shah was shot to death in 1896 while visiting a mosque near Tehran. Few mourned him. He left behind a country dominated by foreigners and plagued by widespread unemployment, crippling inflation, and serious food shortages. His son Muzzaffar, who succeeded him on the Peacock Throne, ignored his people's crying needs and wallowed in all the vices that led Iranians to hate the Qajars. Soon after ascending to the throne, he embarked on a lavish European tour, paid for with money borrowed from a Russian bank. Upon his return he took out another loan, this one from British financiers, and gave them in exchange a share of his customs revenue. Disgusted Iranians began denouncing him in public. When he responded by arresting some of the agitators, antigovernment riots broke out in Tehran and other cities.

Instead of trying to rally Iranians to his side, Muzzaffar al-Din Shah took a step that further inflamed them. In 1901 he sold William Knox D'Arcy, a London-based financier, the "special and exclusive privilege to obtain, exploit, develop, render suitable for trade, carry away and sell natural gas [and] petroleum . . . for a term of sixty years." It would be nearly a decade before D'Arcy struck oil and even longer before his concession turned into a blunt instrument of British imperial policy. Simply by granting it, however, Muzzaffar al-Din Shah shaped all of subsequent Iranian history.

In the decade since the Tobacco Revolt, the political consciousness of Iranians had grown enormously. Their belief that God requires leaders to rule justly, a central tenet of Shiite doctrine, led

many to embrace the ideals of popular sovereignty that were coursing through society. By the time the twentieth century dawned, some had even begun to doubt the very principle of monarchy. Secret societies dedicated to subversion were formed in several cities. Books about the French Revolution, including several that glorified Danton and Robespierre, began passing from hand to eager hand. A sense of unlimited possibility gained strength with news that the supposedly invincible British were losing battles to upstart Boers in South Africa. It was reinforced by the turmoil of 1905 in Russia, where military defeat at the hands of Japan led to a revolt that forced Czar Nicholas II to accept a parliament. The stage was set for revolution in Iran. All that was needed was a spark to set the nation ablaze.

The spark came in December 1905, when a handful of merchants in Tehran were arrested in a dispute over sugar prices. They were subjected to the *bastinado,* a favorite Qajar punishment in which victims were hung by their wrists and thrashed on the soles of their feet. The bazaar erupted in protest. At first, the rioters demanded only dismissal of the local governor who had ordered the beatings. Then, sensing their rising power, they began calling for reduced taxes. Finally, at one of their climactic meetings, they added an astonishing new demand: "In order to carry out reforms in all affairs, it is necessary to establish . . . a national consultative assembly to insure that the law is executed equally in all parts of Iran, so that there can be no difference between high and low, and all may obtain redress of their grievances."

This demand soon subsumed all others. With his people on the brink of revolt, Muzzaffar al-Din Shah had no choice but to accept the idea that Iran should have a parliament. After agreeing, however, he began to stall and for several months did nothing to bring the idea to fruition. The protest movement swelled anew. Islamic clerics took a leading role. Some invoked the authority of the Shiite martyr Hussein, vowing to defend the poor even if it meant exposing themselves, as he did, to the sword of evil. Thrilled by this rhetoric, throngs of people took to the streets in the summer of 1906. Emotions reached a feverish pitch, and several hundred radicals, seeking to organize themselves in a place where troops could not attack them, decided to take *bast,* or refuge, on the grounds of a diplomatic mission. They chose the British Legation, a sprawling

compound with lands covering the space of sixteen city blocks. Most of the Legation staff was away on summer holiday, and its secretary told the protesters that although he wished they would find another sanctuary, he would not, "in view of the acknowledged custom in Persia and the immemorial right of *bast* . . . use, or cause to be used, force to expel them if they came." Before long, fourteen thousand Iranians were inside the compound. They lived in tents according to their guilds and ate from great cauldrons of food prepared in a common kitchen.

This assemblage quickly turned into a school at which the principles of democracy formed the core curriculum. Every day, articles from reformist newspapers were read aloud to the multitude, agitators gave speeches about social progress, and foreign-educated intellectuals translated the works of European philosophers. The Shah, disconcerted but still failing to grasp the intensity of the movement, offered to name a council that would help run the justice ministry. That was not nearly enough to satisfy the protesters. They wanted a Majlis, or parliament, with true power, not simply an advisory council.

"The law must be what the Majlis decides," they declared in one statement. "Nobody is to interfere in the laws of the Majlis."

The Shah finally agreed, although without enthusiasm and with the proviso that laws passed by the Majlis would require his signature before taking effect. This was a climactic moment, comparable in some ways to the signing of the Magna Carta in England seven centuries before. One British diplomat cabled his amazement back to London: "One remarkable feature of this revolution here—for it is surely worthy to be called a revolution—is that the priesthood have found themselves on the side of progress and freedom. This, I should think, is almost unexampled in the world's history. If the reforms which the people, with their help, have fought for become a reality, all their power will be gone."

Having won the Shah's reluctant assent, jubilant protesters left their sanctuary and set to work laying the groundwork for what many believed would be a new Iran. They produced a draft constitution based on Belgium's, which was considered the most progressive in Europe, and convoked national elections for a two-hundred-seat Majlis. Some members were directly elected and others chosen from guilds, one each for the grocers, blacksmiths, printers, butchers,

watchmakers, doctors, tailors, and so on. They assembled for their historic first session on October 7, 1906.

A host of troubles faced the new Majlis. The haste with which the new system had been designed and the inexperience of those who now sought to help rule Iran threw it into discord. Many deputies were uneducated, and there were no political parties to forge them into blocs. Debates over the proposed constitution faltered because no one was quite sure how to divide the powers of government. To make matters worse, it had to be written in great haste because Muzzaffar al-Din Shah was dying and his crown prince, Mohammad Ali, was known to detest the very idea of democratization. It was finally adopted on December 30, 1906, setting Iran on what would be a century of highly uneven progress toward democracy. A week later Muzzaffar al-Din Shah died.

The new monarch, Mohammad Ali Shah, ridiculed and ignored the Majlis. Several deputies demanded that he be deposed if he continued his resistance. Monarchists bitterly counterattacked, and violent debate, often echoed by clashes in the streets, shook the capital. Regional and tribal factions, encouraged by bribes and corrupt arrangements, staged protests that greatly weakened the constitutional movement. Ordinary people began to associate the word *constitution* with upheaval and conflict.

Worst of all, the tenuous alliance between clerics and secular reformers began to unravel. Mullahs who had supported the reform movement became alarmed by the demands of radicals who they said had "thrown out the law of the Prophet and set up their own law instead." The Qajar court played adroitly on their concerns and managed to persuade many of them that their true interests lay with the monarchy.

"It is not advisable for the government of Iran to be constitutional, for in constitutional government all things are free, and in this case there must also be freedom of religion," one courtier asserted in a speech to the Majlis. "Certain persons will insist upon religious freedom, which is contrary to the interests of Islam."

Many clerics shared these fears. When the Majlis debated a bill to legalize secular schools, one asked, "Will entry into them not lead to the overthrow of Islam? Will lessons in foreign languages and the study of chemistry and physics not weaken the students' faith?" Others questioned the very premise of the reform movement: "By

the use of two enticing words, justice and consultation, the freedom seekers have deceived our brothers into making common cause with atheists. . . . Islam, the most complete, the most perfect, took the world by justice and consultation. What has happened that we must bring our regulation of justice from Paris, and our plan of consultation from England?"

This clash between clerics and secular reformers would resonate through modern Iranian history. So would another clash that emerged during this period, the one that split the religious class itself. Some clerics believed that received religion was compatible with modern ideas, but others saw a contradiction and abandoned the reform movement. This debate reflected Iran's age-old conflicts: ancient versus modern, religious versus secular, faith versus reason. It pitted, in the words of one historian, "the Persian trait of openness and assimilation against the Islamic trait of insularity and traditionalism."

Confident that most of the country's religious leaders were with him, Mohammad Ali Shah began a campaign of terror and violence against the Majlis. In June 1908 his men assembled a gang of thugs and sent them rampaging through Tehran shouting, "We want the Koran! We do not want a constitution!" Then he ordered his elite Cossack Brigade to bombard and sack the building where the Majlis was meeting. Iranians rose up in protest in several cities, and many were killed in street fighting. For a time it seemed that full-scale civil war might break out, and at one point the Shah even took *bast* at the Russian Legation.

Both of the imperial powers that sought to dominate Iran, Britain and Russia, realized that the reform movement now threatened their dominant position in the country and encouraged the Shah to continue resisting it. Still the Majlis pressed on. One of its most decisive steps was its vote to hire an American banker, Morgan Shuster, as Iran's treasurer-general. Shuster arrived with a zealot's energy and set out to dismantle the elaborate systems of tax exemptions and back-room deals through which British and Russian syndicates were looting Iran. The governments of both countries demanded that he be removed, and in the fall of 1911 the Russians sent troops to enforce their will. When the Majlis defiantly refused to dismiss him, the royal court, immeasurably strengthened by the presence of foreign soldiers, shut it down and arrested many

of its members. Iran's tumultuous five-year Constitutional Revolution, the first concerted attempt to synthesize Iranian tradition with modern democracy, was over.

The experience of these years profoundly reshaped Iran's collective psychology. Unlike the Tobacco Revolt, which had the narrow aim of defeating a single arbitrary law, the Constitutional Revolution aimed to establish an entirely new social and political order. It was crushed with the decisive help of foreign powers, but only after it had laid the foundation for a democratic Iran. A constitution had been written and adopted, and under its provisions there would be regular elections, which meant political campaigns and at least the semblance of open debate. In the years to come, Iranian rulers could and would ignore, overrule, and act against public opinion, but they would never manage to extinguish the people's conviction that they were endowed with rights no government could take from them. The lessons they learned during this burst of reformist passion shaped the peaceful revolution that Mohammad Mossadegh led nearly half a century later.

Iranians had flocked to the banner of democracy because they believed that establishing the rule of law in their country would help pull them out of poverty. They were also driven by mounting anger directed at two targets. One was the Qajar court, as exemplified first by the execrable Mohammad Ali Shah and then by his obese son, Ahmad, who ascended to the throne in 1909 at the age of twelve. The other was the suffocating role that foreign powers—Britain and Russia in particular—had come to play in Iran.

During the Constitutional Revolution, reformers tried repeatedly to pull Iran out of the orbit of foreign powers. At one point the Majlis went so far as to refuse a loan offered by Russian bankers. Soon afterward it voted to establish a national bank run by Iranians. These efforts, however, were in vain. Iran fell ever more deeply into bondage as the Qajars continued selling the country's assets.

In 1907 Britain and Russia signed a treaty dividing Iran between them. Britain assumed control of southern provinces, while Russia took the north. A strip between the two zones was declared neutral, meaning that Iranians could rule there as long as they did not act against the interests of their powerful guests. Iran was not consulted

but was simply informed of this arrangement after the treaty was signed in St. Petersburg. What had long been informal foreign control of Iran now became an explicit partition, backed by the presence of Russian and British troops. When the treaty formalizing it came before the British Parliament for ratification, one of the few dissenting members lamented that it left Iran "lying between life and death, parceled out, almost dismembered, helpless and friendless at our feet."

As Russia was consumed by civil war and revolution, its influence in Iran waned. After the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, they renounced most of their rights in Iran and canceled all debts that Iran had owed to Czarist Russia. The British, now at the peak of their imperial power, moved quickly to fill the vacuum. Oil was the new focus of their interest. The newly formed Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which grew out of the D'Arcy concession, had begun extracting huge quantities of it from beneath Iranian soil. Winston Churchill called it "a prize from fairyland beyond our wildest dreams."

Realizing the immense value of this new resource, the British in 1919 imposed the harsh Anglo-Persian Agreement on Ahmad Shah's impotent regime, assuring its approval by bribing the Iranian negotiators. Under its provisions the British assumed control over Iran's army, treasury, transport system, and communications network. To secure their new power, they imposed martial law and began ruling by fiat. Lord Curzon, who as foreign secretary was one of the agreement's chief architects, argued its necessity in terms that crystallized a century of British policy toward Iran:

> If it be asked why we should undertake the task at all, and why Persia should not be left to herself and allowed to rot into picturesque decay, the answer is that her geographical position, the magnitude of our interests in the country, and the future safety of our Eastern Empire render it impossible for us now—just as it would have been impossible for us any time during the last fifty years—to disinherit ourselves from what happens in Persia. Moreover, now that we are about to assume the mandate for Mesopotamia, which will make us coterminous with the western frontiers of Asia, we cannot permit the existence between the frontiers of our Indian Empire and Baluchistan and those of our new protectorate, a hotbed of misrule, enemy intrigue, financial

> chaos and political disorder. Further, if Persia were to be alone, there is every reason to fear that she would be overrun by Bolshevik influence from the north. Lastly, we possess in the southwestern corner of Persia great assets in the shape of oil fields, which are worked for the British navy and which give us a commanding interest in that part of the world.

The Anglo-Persian Agreement removed the last vestiges of Iran's sovereignty, but it also infused the nationalist movement with new passion. Iranian patriots were inspired by the emergence of anticolonial forces in other countries, including several under British rule. Radicals in northern provinces established a Communist party, and after Soviet troops landed on the Caspian coast and declared the surrounding area an "Iranian Soviet Socialist Republic," it seemed possible that two world powers might soon be waging war on Iranian soil. In much of the country, millions of people were living in worse conditions than they had ever known. Separatist movements gained force in several provinces. Iran was on the brink of extinction. Conditions were ripe for the rise of a charismatic leader. In 1921 he burst into the nation's consciousness, a rough man on horseback named Reza.

Born in the remote Alborz Mountains near the Russian border, Reza left home as a teenager to follow the family tradition of military service. Rather than join the private army of a local chief, he chose to enlist in the Cossack Brigade, the only unit in the country that was modern, disciplined, and well commanded. It had been founded by Russian officers dispatched by the Czar and served principally as a private guard for the interests of foreigners and the Qajar kings who served them. Reza signed on as a stable boy but was soon given a uniform and began rising through the ranks as Reza Khan. He was six feet four inches tall, as fierce a fighter with his scimitar as with his machine gun, and much admired for his bravery. Profane and hot-tempered, his face deeply pockmarked as a result of smallpox in childhood, he cut a fearsome figure.

During his years as a soldier, Reza had the chance to travel through Iran and see the misery in which most of its people lived. He participated in many operations against the tribes, gangs, and bandits who controlled much of the countryside. "Whenever an expedition was sent to any part of the country to round up brigands

, or quell a disturbance," one British diplomat reported, "he seems to have taken part in it."

Reza quickly came to share his people's disgust with their Qajar rulers. That made him a logical tool for the British, who had tired of dealing with mercurial tribal leaders and wanted a stronger central government. They saw in the Cossack Brigade the means to impose it. To seize control of the brigade and oust its Russian officers, they resolved to stage a coup and replace the Shah's prime minister with one of their choosing. Their candidate was a fiery ex-journalist, Sayyed Zia Tabatabai. To provide Sayyed Zia with the military power he needed, they approached Reza. He was willing. On the evening of February 20, 1921, he and a handful of his fellow officers led two thousand men to the outskirts of Tehran. He roused them with a passionate speech: "Fellow soldiers! You have offered every possible sacrifice in the defense of the land of your fathers. . . . But we have to confess that our loyalty has served merely to preserve the interests of a handful of traitors in the capital. . . . These insignificant men are the same treacherous elements who have sucked the last drop of the nation's blood."

The fervor in camp was intense, and Reza, not a patient man, seized on it. Before dawn the next morning, his soldiers entered Tehran and arrested the prime minister and every member of his cabinet. To the dissolute Ahmad Shah, Reza made two demands: Sayyed Zia must be named prime minister and he himself commander of the Cossack Brigade. The Shah had neither the will nor the means to resist. Within the space of a few hours, with almost no resistance, the coup had succeeded. It was a testament to the power of the British, the weakness of the dying Qajar dynasty, and the bold self-confidence of Reza Khan.

Cossack regiments immediately set about pacifying the country and suppressing tribal armies. Power flowed into Reza's hands. He dismissed Sayyed Zia just three months after the coup and then forced him to leave the country. Soon afterward he persuaded the Shah himself to leave, ostensibly on a temporary trip for health reasons. Soon this ambitious soldier was prime minister, army commander, and effective head of the resurgent Iranian state.

Reza had proclaimed himself a nationalist, but he recognized the power of his British backers and the debt he owed them. One study of the coup concluded: "There can be no doubt about the

involvement of British army officers. . . . The day before the march to Tehran, Sayyed Zia had paid 2,000 tumans to Reza Khan and distributed 20,000 among his 2,000 men. No Iranian could have raised such a substantial amount of cash over a short period of time."

Once he had completed his drive to power, Reza had to choose a political framework in which to rule. He fervently admired the Turkish reformer Kemal Atatürk and for a time considered following Atatürk's example by declaring Iran a republic and installing himself as president. That idea terrified the religious class, which had been deeply shocked by Atatürk's decisions to abolish the sultanate and the Islamic caliphate. They insisted that Reza preserve the monarchy, and finally won him to their side.

Although Reza was uneducated and barely literate, he had a deep understanding of the Iranian style of politics. A couple of years after his coup, he conceived a theatrical drama that he correctly calculated would carry him to the pinnacle of power. He retired to a small village, supposedly to reflect and meditate, and resigned from all his government posts. Before departing, he had arranged to be bombarded by demands that he return to power. For a time Reza pretended to resist, but then, as he had hoped, the hated Ahmad Shah announced his intention to return home. The Majlis, which had reconstituted itself after the debacle of 1911 but never managed to accumulate any real power, was horrified at this prospect. United in rebellion, it pronounced the Qajar dynasty dead and offered the Peacock Throne to Reza. He assumed it on April 25, 1926, and proclaimed himself Reza Shah. His new dynasty, he announced, would be known by the family name Pahlavi, after a language that Persians spoke before the Muslim conquest.

Reza Shah was not averse to denouncing the British in public, but he and they had fundamental interests in common. He was the strongman they had sought, a reliable figure with whom they could bargain and whom they could, if necessary, depose. "The old Persia was a loose-knit pyramid resting on its base," observed the always-perceptive British diplomat Harold Nicholson. "The new Persian pyramid is almost equally loose, but resting on its apex; hence, it is much easier to overthrow."

It was impossible for Reza Shah to pull his country out of the orbit of foreign powers, especially the all-powerful British, but after consolidating his power, he worked steadily to limit their influence.

He accepted no loans from foreign financiers, banned the sale of property to non-Iranians, revoked a concession that gave the British-owned Imperial Bank of Iran the exclusive right to issue Iranian currency, and even forbade officials of his foreign ministry to attend receptions at foreign embassies. When the British insisted that he hire European engineers to build the rail line that was one of his grandest dreams, he did so on the condition that the engineers and their families agree to stand beneath each bridge they built when a train passed over it for the first time.

Subduing the vast expanse of Iran by military force would have required an enormous army. Instead, Reza Shah imposed his will by exemplary terror. Stories of his ruthlessness terrified and then pacified his people.

In 1935 religious leaders called a protest against Reza Shah's ban of the veil for women and his order that men wear billed caps that would prevent them from touching the floor with their foreheads during prayer. They gathered with several hundred believers in the sacred Khorasan mosque. As soon as Reza Shah learned of their assembly, he ordered soldiers to storm the mosque and massacre them. More than one hundred were killed. There were no further protests against his religious reforms.

Time and again, Reza Shah resolved problems with this brand of brutal decisiveness. Once during a visit to Hamedan in western Iran, for example, he is said to have learned that people there were going hungry because bakers were hoarding wheat in order to drive up prices. He ordered the first baker he saw thrown into an oven and burned alive. By the next morning, every bakery in town was filled with low-priced bread.

Many Iranians were appalled by stories like these, but many others, remembering that their country had enjoyed glory only when it was ruled by a powerful leader, remained silent or applauded. None could deny Reza Shah's achievements. He began by wiping out gangs of bandits that terrorized many parts of Iran. Then he embarked on a huge construction program that gave the country new avenues, plazas, highways, factories, ports, hospitals, government buildings, railroad lines, and schools for both boys and girls. He created the country's first civil service and the first national army it had known for centuries. He introduced the metric system, the modern calendar, the use of surnames, and civil marriage and

divorce. Ever ready to scorn tradition, he restricted traditional clothing and forbade camel caravans to enter cities. He promulgated legal codes and established a network of secular courts to enforce them. In 1935 he announced that he would no longer tolerate references to his country as *Persia,* a word used mainly by foreigners, and would insist on *Iran,* the name by which its own citizens knew it. With typical resolve, he ordered that any mail from abroad addressed to Persia be returned unopened.

Yet for all Reza Shah's reformist passion, he did not manage a true social transformation. Under his rule, newspapers were strictly censored, labor organizing forbidden, and opposition figures murdered, jailed, or forced to flee. He forced nomadic tribes, which he considered relics of the past incompatible with a modern state, into barren settlements where thousands suffered and died. Commerce was centralized in the hands of the state and a small cadre of loyal entrepreneurs. The Shah himself became enormously wealthy by extracting bribes from foreign businesses and extorting money from tribal leaders. He confiscated so much land that at the peak of his power, he was the country's largest landowner.

"Reza Shah eliminated all the thieves and bandits in Iran," one member of the British Parliament observed, "and made his countrymen realize that henceforth there would be only one thief in Iran."

In 1934 Reza Shah traveled to Turkey to meet Atatürk. The two men got along famously, but as they toured the Turkish countryside, the Shah became depressed and frustrated as he realized how quickly Turkey was progressing toward modernity and secularism. He returned home determined to redouble his campaign to transform Iranian society. In his zeal, he charged ahead without regard to the country's long-established social patterns or its religious beliefs. Utterly lacking Atatürk's statesmanship and political skill, he turned much of the population against him.

Reza Shah was fascinated by the fascist movements that emerged in Europe during the 1930s. Mussolini, Franco, and Hitler seemed to him to be embarked on the same path he had chosen, purifying and uniting weak, undisciplined nations. He launched an oppressive campaign to obliterate the identity of minority groups, especially Kurds and Azeris, and he established a Society for Public Guidance to glorify his ideas and person. Baldur von Schirach, head

of Hitler Youth, led a stream of Nazi dignitaries who visited Iran and spoke glowingly of the emerging German-Iranian alliance.

"The cardinal goal of the German nation is to attain its past glories by promoting national pride, creating a hatred of foreigners, and preventing Jews and foreigners from embezzlement and treason," one of the Shah's newspapers declared. "Our goals are certainly the same."

Partly because he needed a foreign friend who shared his growing enmity toward Britain and the Soviet Union, Reza Shah developed great sympathy for the German cause. When World War II broke out, he declared a policy of neutrality that tilted decidedly toward Germany. He allowed hundreds of German agents to operate in Iran. Many worked to build support networks among regional warlords. Western leaders feared that the Nazis were planning to use Iran as a platform for an attack across the Soviet Union's southern border that would greatly complicate the Allied war effort. To prevent that, British and Soviet troops entered Iran on August 25, 1941. Their planes dropped leaflets over Tehran. "We have decided that the Germans must go," they said, "and if Iran will not deport them, then the English and the Russians will."

Some Iranians must have appreciated the irony of these two countries positing themselves as Iran's friends and protectors, but there was little they could do. Iran's army yielded in a matter of days. After seizing strategic points around the country, Allied commanders demanded that Reza Shah sever his government's ties to Germany and allow the free use of his territory by their forces. If he had not alienated himself from almost every segment of Iranian society, and if he had kept a cadre of wise advisers around him instead of systematically exiling or murdering them, he might have been able to resist. Instead he found himself alone, his dreams shattered by his own narrow-mindedness, corruption, and boundless egotism.

Reza Shah did not wish to work for the Allies, and they had no use for him either. He abdicated on September 16, 1941. The next day his eldest son, twenty-one-year-old Mohammad Reza, was sworn in to succeed him. No more was heard from Reza, who died in Johannesburg three years later.

Although Reza Shah imagined himself a modernizing visionary, in fact he reinforced the tradition of *istibdad,* or absolute rule, that

lies at the heart of Iranian history. His reforms were superficial and, because of the brutality with which they were imposed, deeply resented by his subjects. He made no progress toward creating the sense of shared enterprise and civic responsibility that is at the heart of successful societies. His efforts to rid Iran of foreign influence were praiseworthy in theory but disastrous in effect. In the end, his dictatorial impulses brought him down by driving him toward an alliance with fascist powers. His departure left Iran in the hands of foreigners and a weak, confused young king. Monarchy had once again failed to resolve the country's continuing crisis of development and identity. When World War II ended, Iranians were desperate for a new kind of leader.

CHAPTER 4

A Wave of Oil

Years in the rocky Iranian desert, where smallpox raged, bandits and warlords ruled, water was all but unavailable, and temperatures often soared past 120 degrees, might have driven lesser men than George Reynolds to madness or worse. Reynolds, however, was one of those legendary figures whose persistence and audacity have changed world history. He was a self-taught geologist and a petroleum engineer with several expeditions in the Sumatran jungle to his credit. During the first decade of the twentieth century, already in his fifties, he crisscrossed the barren wastelands of Iran in search of oil. To help him pull his wagonloads of equipment and dig his wells, he had at his service a ragged band that included a handful of Polish and Canadian drillers, a comically incompetent Indian doctor, and several dozen tribesmen who had trouble even understanding what oil is. "A more helpless crew I seldom saw," he lamented in one letter home.

Home for Reynolds was London, and there his patron, the millionaire dandy William Knox D'Arcy, waited anxiously for good news. D'Arcy had made a fortune prospecting for gold in Australia but was not satisfied. He sensed that oil would prove even more

errand-boys. But when the speaker asked who wished to begin the debate, Mossadegh sat quietly and expressionless. A prominent right-wing deputy named Jamal Emami, who was on the British payroll, took the floor instead. Emami did not even mention Sayyed Zia. Instead he launched into a bitter attack on Mossadegh, pillorying him for having plunged the Majlis into immobility and paralyzed the country with his constant carping. If the old man wanted a real challenge, Emami said scornfully, he should try being prime minister himself and see how difficult the job was. Mossadegh had several times turned aside suggestions that he take over the government, and Emami said he knew the reason why: Mossadegh was one of those irresponsible windbags who delight in making speeches about how wrong everyone else is, but never offer anything positive.

The chamber fell silent as Emami finished. Mossadegh waited for a long moment and then rose to his feet. Speaking slowly and deliberately, he said that he was honored and grateful for the suggestion that he become prime minister and would in all humility accept. Everyone was stunned, Emami most of all. Soon the shock turned to pandemonium. A formal motion was made that Mossadegh be named prime minister, and the speaker called for an immediate vote. It passed by a margin of seventy-nine to twelve.

Sensing the power he held at that moment, Mossadegh said that he would serve as prime minister only if the Majlis also voted to approve an act he had drawn up to implement the nationalization of Anglo-Iranian. Under its provisions, a parliamentary committee would audit Anglo-Iranian's books, weigh the claims of both sides for compensation, begin sending Iranians abroad to learn the skills of running an oil industry, and draw up articles of incorporation for a new National Iranian Oil Company. The Majlis approved it unanimously that very afternoon.

The unthinkable had now happened. Mossadegh, the symbol of Iranian nationalism and resistance to royal power, had suddenly arrived at the pinnacle of power. It was a moment of exhilaration but also of profound uncertainty. Everyone understood that a clash of titans was approaching. No one dared to guess what it might mean for Iran and the rest of the world.

CHAPTER 6

Unseen Enemies Everywhere

On the morning of June 26, 1950, millions of Iranians and millions of Americans gathered apprehensively around their radios. All knew they would hear news that might reshape their lives forever. Most were grave and fearful. The crisis that was gathering in Iran, however, had nothing to do with the one suddenly gripping the United States.

That day in Iran, the Shah announced that he would nominate General Ali Razmara, the ill-fated army commander, as prime minister. In shops, factories, and tea houses across the country, people huddled to ask one another what this might mean. Would Razmara be able to strike a last-minute deal with the British? If not, what would happen? Might British troops invade Iran? Would there be a revolution? Was the nation headed toward redemption or catastrophe?

Americans were preoccupied with very different news. Communist soldiers had just poured across the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea and were racing southward. The United Nations Security Council met in emergency session and warned the invaders that if they did not withdraw, war would follow. Since both of the world's superpowers had nuclear arsenals, many Americans feared that Armageddon was at hand.

The huge gap between what preoccupied Iranians and what preoccupied Americans on that June day reflected the obsessions that gripped their countries as the second half of the twentieth century began. Iranians were marching toward a thrilling but also terrifying confrontation with Great Britain and its Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Americans faced a prospect no less sobering. The war in Korea was final proof that their country was now locked in a worldwide struggle against a fearsome adversary.

In ways that neither nation yet understood, these two crises would ultimately become one. The United States, challenged by what most Americans saw as a relentless communist advance, slowly ceased to view Iran as a country with a unique history that faced a unique political challenge. Its duel with Britain became subsumed in the East–West conflict.

A great sense of fear, particularly the fear of encirclement, shaped American consciousness during this period. Allied leaders who met at Potsdam two months after the end of World War II pledged to cooperate "on a democratic and peaceful basis," but behind their generous words lay deep mistrust. Soviet power had already subdued Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Communist governments were imposed on Bulgaria and Romania in 1946, Hungary and Poland in 1947, and Czechoslovakia in 1948. Albania and Yugoslavia also turned to communism. Greek communists made a violent bid for power. Soviet soldiers blocked land routes to Berlin for sixteen months. In 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested a nuclear weapon. That same year, pro-Western forces in China lost their civil war to communists led by Mao Zedong. From Washington it seemed that enemies were on the march everywhere.

In response to this changing international climate, President Truman approved the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947. Its vague original mandate, which was to carry out "functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security," was expanded a year later to include "sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures . . . subversion [and] assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation movements, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world." In January 1950 the National Security Council prepared a seminal document, known as NSC-68, that asserted the need for the United States to confront

communist movements not only in regions of vital security interest but wherever they appeared.

"The assault on free institutions is worldwide now," it concluded, "and in the context of the present polarization of power, a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere."

The Cold War drove the United States to recognize not only the power of its enemies but also the vital importance of its friends. In 1949 it brought eleven of them together into a potent military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Solidarity between the United States and Britain was the bedrock of this new alliance. Differences over how to deal with countries like Iran could not be allowed to weaken it.

President Truman was among many who believed that the Soviets wished to draw Iran into their orbit. The day after North Koreans invaded South Korea, he told one of his aides that Korea was not the only country worrying him. He walked to a globe near his desk in the Oval Office, placed his index finger on Iran, and said, "Here is where they will start trouble if we aren't careful."

Britain and Russia had trampled on Iranian sovereignty for more than a century, and many Iranians naturally came to detest them both. For the United States, however, most felt only admiration. The few Americans they had come to know were generous and self-sacrificing, interested not in wealth or power but in helping Iran.

The American best-known to ordinary Iranians was an earnest young schoolteacher named Howard Baskerville, who was killed in 1909 while fighting alongside his Iranian friends in the Constitutional Revolution. He was revered as a martyr and called "the American Lafayette." Many took his sacrifice as proof of how much more admirable Americans were than other foreigners.

At the time Baskerville was shot down by royalist soldiers, a visionary American educator, Samuel Jordan, was beginning a forty-three-year stay in Tehran. His Alborz College was among the first modern secondary schools in the country, and thousands of its graduates went on to shape Iranian life. The Presbyterian mission for which Jordan worked also ran a hospital and one of the country's only schools for girls.

"Americans were regarded with nearly universal admiration and

affection," one of its graduates wrote years later. "The American contribution to the improvement and, it was felt, the dignity of our impoverished, strife-torn country had gone far beyond their small numbers. . . . Without attempting to force their way of life on people or convert us to their religion, they had learned Persian and started schools, hospitals and medical dispensaries all over Iran."

The dedication of these exemplary men and women was not the only reason many Iranians admired the United States. American officials had spoken out to defend Iran's rights. The United States sharply criticized the 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement through which Britain acquired colonial powers in Iran. That same year at Versailles, President Woodrow Wilson was the only world leader who supported Iran's unsuccessful claim for monetary compensation from Britain and Russia for the effects of their occupation during World War I. In the mid-1920s an American envoy in Tehran was able to report that "Persians of all classes still have unbounded confidence in America."

Until the outbreak of World War II, the United States had no active policy toward Iran. After the war, however, American power began reaching every corner of the world. The crucial role that oil played in the Allied victory led policymakers in Washington to focus especially on the Middle East. They sharpened their interest as the Cold War intensified.

A giant figure in American diplomatic history, Dean Acheson directed United States policy toward Iran during this period. Acheson sympathized with the forces of Third World nationalism. With his gaunt frame, pin-striped suits, homburg, and jaunty mustache, he looked every inch the patrician, although in fact he had not been born into wealth. In his youth a Republican who admired Theodore Roosevelt, he later became a Democrat and served in Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Truman recognized him as a kindred spirit and, after winning the 1948 election, named him secretary of state. Both men were determined to show people in poor countries that the United States, not the Soviet Union, was their true friend.

Soon after taking office, Acheson named an energetic and liberal-minded Texan, George McGhee, as his assistant secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian and African affairs. McGhee was just thirty-eight years old when he assumed the influential post. He had studied geology at the University of Oklahoma and had gone on to win a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. When he finished his studies, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company offered him a job as a geophysicist in Iran, but he declined, returned to the United States, and started his own oil company. Its success made him wealthy enough to work for the State Department without pay. His background in the oil industry, however, led some in the British Foreign Office to mistrust him. They suspected him of trying to weaken Anglo-Iranian so that American oil companies, perhaps some in which he had a hidden interest, could take its place in Iran.

McGhee attended many of the meetings that Mohammad Reza Shah held with American officials during his visit to Washington at the end of 1949 and was put off by the young monarch's "grandiose and unrealistic" military ambitions. Soon afterward, he invited officials of Anglo-Iranian to a meeting. He told them that he had read their company's most recent annual report and was impressed with how much profit they were making. Perhaps it was time, he suggested, for the company to begin sharing its wealth more equitably with Iran. His guests scorned the idea. One of them went so far as to say that if Anglo-Iranian began giving in to Iran's demands, it would soon be left with "nothing in the till."

This debate sharpened over the next months. McGhee repeatedly warned directors of Anglo-Iranian that if they hoped to save Prime Minister Razmara and persuade the Majlis to approve their Supplemental Agreement, they must make concessions. At one point, angered by the company's insistence that it could not afford to pay Iran more, he asked the State Department's petroleum expert, Richard Funkhouser, to prepare a report on its operations. The report concluded that Anglo-Iranian was an "exceptionally profitable" company, that it sold its oil for between ten and thirty times the cost of producing it, and that its arrogance had made it "genuinely hated in Iran."

McGhee, deeply worried about what he saw as a looming disaster, decided to travel to London to press his case in person. He arrived there in September of 1950 to a frosty welcome. Senior officials of both the British government and Anglo-Iranian resolutely rejected his pleas for compromise. They told him that the company would not train more Iranians for supervisory positions, would not open its books to Iranian auditors, and would not offer Iran more money for its oil. "One penny more and the company goes broke,"

said the chairman, Sir William Fraser. That astonishing piece of mendacity made clear to McGhee that more talks were fruitless. He packed up and returned home.

British officials, steeped in the world's most fully developed colonial tradition, were baffled by what they saw as the Truman administration's refusal to agree that Britain should benefit from the work it had done in foreign countries. What seemed like rapacious imperialism to the Americans—and even more so to the Iranians—seemed only common sense to the British. They insisted that they were doing the world a great service by their work in Iran, as Sir Donald Fergusson, the permanent undersecretary at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, wrote in one memorandum:

> It was British enterprise, skill and effort which discovered oil under the soil of Persia, which has got the oil out, which has built the refinery, which has developed markets for Persian oil in thirty or forty countries, with wharves, storage tanks and pumps, road and rail tanks and other distribution facilities, and also an immense fleet of tankers. This was done at a time when there was no easy outlet for Persian oil in competition with the vastly greater American industry. None of these things would or could have been done by the Persian government or the Persian people.

The chasm between American and British perceptions of the gathering crisis in Iran was vividly symbolized by the new ambassadors both countries sent to Tehran in 1950. Henry Grady, the American, was an economist with firsthand experience in Greece and India, two countries where politics was being reshaped by nationalism. Grady believed that if the United States did not align itself with nationalist forces in the developing world, those forces would turn toward Marxism and the Soviet Union. He was a fervent anticommunist but an equally fervent anti-imperialist.

In both temperament and politics, Grady was the polar opposite of his British counterpart in Tehran, the fire-breathing Sir Francis Shepherd. The reports these two ambassadors sent back to their respective capitals were so different that they hardly seemed to be portraying the same country. Grady saw an impoverished land long exploited by the British, who sucked the country's lifeblood and treated the pitiful Shah like a servant. Shepherd, however, considered Anglo-Iranian a wise and paternal company that had brought

Iran nothing but good. He had no use for ungrateful Iranians—or meddling American diplomats—who believed otherwise.

In February 1951 George McGhee summoned all American ambassadors in the Middle East to a meeting in Istanbul. One of the main agenda items was the friction that had developed between the United States and Britain over the question of Iran. The gathered diplomats concluded that Anglo-Iranian's militancy was "one of the greatest political liabilities affecting the United States/United Kingdom interests in the Middle East." The company's "reactionary and outmoded policies," they declared in a secret memorandum, were not only creating a dangerously explosive situation but constituted "a handicap in the control of Communism in Iran." This consensus guided American policy through the Truman administration.

The Iranian crisis deepened over the next few weeks. Prime Minister Razmara was assassinated on March 7, and on March 15 the Majlis took its historic vote, "accepting the principle that oil should be nationalized throughout Iran." Some deputies may have believed that the British would find a way-to-live with this vote because the British Parliament itself had recently nationalized key British industries. As it did so, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin had mused, "What argument can I advance against anyone claiming the right to nationalize the resources of their country? We are doing the same thing here with our power in the shape of coal, electricity, railways, transport and steel." Bevin was out of office by the time the Iranian crisis exploded, however, and those he left behind in government agreed unanimously that although nationalization might be a wise path at home, it could not be abided abroad.

Immediately after the Majlis voted to nationalize Anglo-Iranian, McGhee flew to Tehran. He arrived on March 17 to find Ambassador Shepherd in a foul mood. Shepherd blamed the vote on Americans, specifically on Aramco, the Arabian-American Oil Company. Aramco's announcement that it would begin splitting its profits with the Saudi Arabian government on a fifty-fifty basis, Shepherd complained, had "thrown a wrench" into Britain's negotiating position. McGhee replied that he had warned Anglo-Iranian months earlier that the fifty-fifty deal was forthcoming. The company, he told Shepherd, had brought its troubles on itself by being "too rigid and too slow to recognize that a new situation had been created in Iran which required a new approach."

That evening McGhee called on the Shah. Their meeting was most disconcerting, as McGhee wrote afterward:

> I had been with the Shah about a year and a half earlier during his much-publicized official visit to Washington. He had then been a proud, erect young man, insistent that his requests be taken seriously. As I saw him in the darkened audience chamber in which he received me, lounging on a sofa, he was a dejected, almost broken man. I sensed that he feared he too might be assassinated. . . . Did he think with our support he could avert nationalization?
>
> The Shah said he couldn't do it. He pleaded that we not ask him to do it. He couldn't even form a government. Everyone was afraid. There were unseen enemies everywhere. . . . He looked lost, as if he thought the whole affair hopeless. I left him alone in his darkened room. I will always remember his sad, brooding face. . . . The specter of death and impending chaos hung gloomily over Tehran like a dark cloud. I was sad when I said goodbye.

On his way home, McGhee stopped in London and met there with Sir William Fraser, the Anglo-Iranian chairman, and Foreign Secretary Morrison. The meetings were so stormy that Morrison decided to send a delegation to Washington to present Britain's case. He named Sir Oliver Franks, the British ambassador in Washington, who had been McGhee's tutor in morals at Oxford, as its chairman.

The meetings stretched over nine days. British emissaries argued that allowing Iran to nationalize the oil company "would be widely regarded as a victory for the Russians" and would also "cause a loss of one hundred million pounds per annum in the United Kingdom's balance of payments, thus seriously affecting our rearmament program and our cost of living." Franks insisted that Iran had "no solid grievances" against either Britain or the oil company, whereas Britain was vitally concerned about losing "a prime strategic necessity." He described Anglo-Iranian as a crucial asset to the West "not only because of its magnitude as an element of our balance of payments . . . but also because of the power it gave us to control the movement of raw materials." Iranian oil was vital "to our common defense," and losing it would cripple "our ability to rearm."

McGhee listened for several days in quiet frustration. When he finally spoke, it was to warn once again that the British must compromise with Iran or face disaster. He urged them to start splitting their profits with Iran on a fifty-fifty basis, "which had an aura of fairness understandable to the ordinary man." The British would not be persuaded. "In the end," he wrote later, "I was, with great regret, forced to advise Franks in our final meeting on April 18 that their proposals did not, in the case of accommodation to nationalization, meet the requirements we saw for success."

Soon after the talks in Washington ended, Iran set out on its brave new course. On May 1, 1951, Mohammad Reza Shah signed the momentous law revoking Anglo-Iranian's concession and establishing the National Iranian Oil Company to take its place. The next day Britain demanded that the law be suspended. On May 6 Mohammad Mossadegh submitted his cabinet to the Majlis. It was immediately approved, and on that same day Mossadegh took office as prime minister.

Historic as Mossadegh's rise to power was for Iranians, it was at least as stunning for the British. They were used to manipulating Iranian prime ministers like chess pieces, and now, suddenly, they faced one who seemed to hate them. "All of Iran's misery, wretchedness, lawlessness and corruption during the last fifty years," the state-controlled Radio Tehran declared in a broadcast soon after Mossadegh took office, "has been caused by oil and the extortions of the oil company."

For a brief moment, Prime Minister Attlee seemed disposed to compromise. Attlee was a socialist who had helped draft the plans under which Britain had nationalized some of its own basic industries. At one cabinet meeting he suggested that Britain might make a public statement accepting nationalization of Anglo-Iranian, thereby giving Mossadegh "an opportunity of saving face," and then arrange some sort of complicated deal under which the company would retain most of its privileges. Herbert Morrison vigorously objected. He warned Attlee that any concessions to Iran would set an intolerable precedent and encourage nationalists everywhere. Attlee allowed himself to be persuaded and signed off on a cable to Ambassador Franks in Washington. It directed him to tell Acheson that "Persian oil is of vital importance to our economy, and that we regard it as essential to do everything possible to prevent the Persians from getting away with a breach of their contractual obligations."

Acheson, however, believed that Mossadegh represented "a very deep revolution, nationalist in character, which was sweeping not only Iran but the whole Middle East." He and others in the Truman administration never stopped urging their British counterparts to turn away from their policy of confrontation and to offer Mossadegh a legitimate compromise. They did this despite realizing that Mossadegh would not be easy to deal with, as a profile in the *New York Times* made clear:

> The tidal wave of nationalistic fervor that engulfed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in the space of a few weeks has now unexpectedly cast one of Iran's most redoubtable demagogues, the aged Mohammad Mossadegh, upon the pinnacle of power. In the popular view, the new Premier represents a figure of retributive justice who galvanized the impressionable Parliament and led it to victory over the dragon, Anglo-Iranian, which, in the eyes of many, had for years been feeding upon the vitals of the country. . . .
>
> A foreign diplomat, admitted recently to the new Premier's presence, asked Dr. Mossadegh to explain exactly how he intended to proceed with the expropriation of Anglo-Iranian. For half an hour Dr. Mossadegh described the misdeeds of British imperialism over the past 100 years. When he had finished, the diplomat repeated the question. Again the Premier denounced British imperialism. The interview ended there.
>
> What will Dr. Mossadegh do next? The question remains open and the answer is anybody's guess.

Messages that flew between Washington and London during mid-1951 did nothing to narrow differences between the two allies over how to deal with Mossadegh. On May 18 the State Department issued a public statement declaring that Americans "fully recognize the sovereign rights of Iran and sympathize with Iran's desire that increased benefits accrue to that country from the development of its petroleum." Morrison read it with dismay and in a cable to Ambassador Franks that afternoon said that he was "really rather annoyed at the American attitude of relative indifference to a situation which may be most grave to us all."

Soon afterward, Morrison sent a message to Acheson in which he sought to lay out the British position in the clearest possible terms. The issue Britain faced in Iran, he wrote, "concerns *the* major asset which we hold in the field of raw materials. Control of that asset is of supreme importance. . . . Parliamentary and public feeling in England would not readily accept a position where we surrender effective control of an asset of such magnitude."

The Americans were unmoved. On May 31 Truman sent a note to Attlee urging that negotiations "be entered into at once" to prevent a worsening of the "explosive situation" in Iran. Attlee replied that allowing Iran to get away with nationalization would have "the most serious repercussions in the whole free world." He realized, however, that given Truman's insistence, the British would have to make at least a show of engaging Mossadegh.

At Attlee's suggestion, Anglo-Iranian sent a delegation of officials led by the company's deputy chairman, Basil Jackson, to Tehran for negotiations. Mossadegh welcomed them by arranging for Iranian gendarmes to take over the Anglo-Iranian office at the western town of Kermanshah on the day they arrived. As if that were not enough to set the tone, Ambassador Grady restated the American position in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*.

"Since nationalization is an accomplished fact, it would be wise for Britain to adopt a conciliatory attitude," Grady asserted. "Mossadegh's National Front party is the closest thing to a moderate and stable political element in the national parliament."

Iranians at the negotiating table said that they were willing to talk, but only after the visitors from London accepted nationalization of the "former company" as a fait accompli. Jackson refused, insisting that Iran was bound by the 1933 accord and could not renounce it until its sixty-year term expired. He had a counteroffer: Anglo-Iranian would pay Iran £10 million and another £3 million monthly while negotiations proceeded; it was also willing to transfer its assets to the newly created National Iranian Oil Company, but only if it could establish a new company that would have "exclusive use of those assets." This was a not-so-subtle declaration that Britain still did not accept the fact of nationalization. It reflected the Foreign Office's unaltered position, which was that the British "can be flexible in profits, administration or partnership, but not in the issue of control." To no one's surprise, Iranian negotiators rejected the offer.

On June 20 Mossadegh named a French-educated engineer, Mehdi Bazargan, as the managing director of the National Iranian

Oil Company. Bazargan flew immediately to Abadan, where British administrators were still running the refinery, and declared himself their new boss. His first order was that captains of British tankers must henceforth provide him with receipts before they sailed, listing the amount of oil they were carrying so he could keep track of how much was being exported.

The British considered this intolerable. They believed, as their United Nations ambassador asserted, that the oil was "clearly the legal property of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company." When tanker captains refused to provide receipts, Bazargan threatened to have Anglo-Iranian's general manager, Eric Drake, arrested for sabotage. As that crime would carry the death penalty under a bill pending in the Majlis (it was later withdrawn), Ambassador Shepherd advised Drake to leave Iran. He did so, and began running the company from an office in Basra, across the Shatt-al-Arab in Iraq. From there, he continued to refuse the demand for receipts. When the Iranians insisted, Sir William Fraser issued an order of his own from London. Tanker captains were to pump back all the oil in their holds and leave Abadan empty.

Iran had until that moment been the world's fourth largest oil exporter, supplying 90 percent of Europe's petroleum. Now, since it owned not a single tanker, it could not export a drop. That was fine with Fraser, who still believed he could bend the Iranians to his will. "When they need money," he predicted, "they will come crawling to us on their bellies."

For Fraser and his colleagues at Anglo-Iranian, as well as for officials of the British government, the very idea that Iran would nationalize its oil industry seemed absurd and impossible, even as it was happening. They had trouble taking it seriously. In their view the entire campaign was most likely a monumental bluff, a ploy to squeeze more money out of London, or, if not that, then simply a petulant outburst that would end when the consequences became clear.

"At no time before a year or two before 1951 did anyone contemplate that we would not stay there forever," Eric Drake recalled afterward. "We were there by an international agreement between the government of Iran and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, so there was no reason it should ever come to an end as far as we could see."

Britain's press enthusiastically jumped aboard the anti-Mossadegh bandwagon. The London *Times* blamed "irresponsible Persian politicians" for stirring up the country's uneducated masses. The *Economist* declared that Anglo-Iranian had become a "monumental scapegoat" and asserted: "No Persian with any common sense really believes that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company is responsible for the horrifying poverty of the masses." The *Observer* described Mossadegh as a "Robespierre fanatic" and a "tragic Frankenstein" who was "obsessed with one xenophobic idea."

Across the Atlantic, the tone was quite different. The *Washington Post* asserted that most Iranians saw the oil company as "a thriving state within a stricken state—as a symbol of their poverty." The *New York Times* said that many Middle East specialists considered Mossadegh a liberator comparable to Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine. The *Chicago Daily News* reported that even many Britons were disturbed by the way their government was handling the issue. "British critics do not think that McGhee was really responsible for the Iranian crisis," its London correspondent wrote. "They agreed that the whole affair was badly handled by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company with the connivance, by default, of the Foreign Office."

There was indeed dissent in Britain. Anglo-Iranian's own labor adviser, Sir Frederick Leggett, wrote to a friend in the Foreign Office that the company was in its "deplorable position" because it had "failed to make a gesture of recognition of Persian national aspirations." Minister of State Kenneth Younger complained in a memo to Morrison about "the short-sightedness and the lack of political awareness shown by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company" and asserted that it "never even seriously tried" to make a "proper estimate" of the situation. Earl Mountbatten told his superiors at the Admiralty that instead of listening to the "notoriously bellicose" Herbert Morrison's advice on how to "cow these insolent natives," Britain should realize that "economic and military threats could only make things worse."

Even some British diplomats were sending contrary reports to the Foreign Office. The labor attaché in Tehran filed a cable describing conditions at Abadan as deplorable, saying that workers there lived in "cottages made of mud bricks, with no electricity, without outside water supply and sanitary arrangements . . . in other words, in veritable slums." And from Tel Aviv, the British minister

forwarded a *Jerusalem Post* report that he said convinced him that Anglo-Iranian "deserved what happened." It was written by an Israeli who had spent several years working at Abadan alongside Iranians he described as "the poorest creatures on earth."

> They lived during the seven hot months of the year under the trees. . . . In winter times these masses moved into big halls, built by the company, housing up to 3,000–4,000 people without walls of partition between them. Each family occupied the space of a blanket. There were no lavatories. . . . In debates with British colleagues we often tried to show them the mistake they were making in treating the Persians the way they did. The answer was usually: "We English have had hundreds of years of experience on how to treat the Natives. Socialism is all right back home, but out here you have to be the master."

On June 28 Mossadegh issued an appeal to British technicians and managers at Abadan. He told them that Iran was "anxious to benefit" from their expertise and promised that if they stayed at their jobs, "our country will welcome you warmly." Fraser, determined that Iran not be able to run the refinery by itself, responded by ordering most of the company's British employees to leave Iran.

With Iranians already in control of the Anglo-Iranian office in Kermanshah, the next step was for them to take over the Abadan and Tehran offices. They did so during the last days of June. The head of the Abadan office had wisely moved his sensitive papers to the local British consulate, which Iranians could not enter. Richard Seddon, head of the Tehran office, was not as quick. When a delegation of Iranians arrived to search his home, they found many files still there, including some burning in the fireplace. An official of Iran's foreign ministry who was present that night summarized what they found:

> Although compromising documents had allegedly been removed, enough papers were left behind to make it easy for Mossadegh to prove that AIOC had interfered in all aspects of Iranian political life. The documents revealed that the company had influenced senators, Majlis deputies and former cabinet ministers, and that those who had opposed it had been subtly forced out of office. Newspapers had been paid to publish articles alleging that many of the National Front's leaders were actually paid stooges of AIOC. . . .
>
> Among the documents was evidence that former Prime Minister Ali Mansur had begged AIOC to allow him to remain in office, promising in return to appoint a new finance minister more agreeable to the company. Another set of letters revealed that AIOC had helped Bahram Sharogh to become director of Iran's Radio and Propaganda Department, and that on a trip to London he had been recruited to serve the company. There were also directives and reports on influencing guilds, through the Mayor of Tehran, to rise against those in the bazaar who supported the National Front.

The government quickly made these documents public, and many Iranians took them as further proof of the oil company's perfidy. Mossadegh said they proved that Anglo-Iranian had engaged in a "sinister and inadmissible" campaign to subvert Iranian democracy. Majlis deputies were driven to new levels of anticolonial outrage. So were news commentators, one of whom wrote in a Tehran paper: "Now that the curtain is lifted and the real identity of traitors posing as newspaper men, Majlis deputies, governors and even prime ministers is laid bare, these men should be riddled with bullets and their carcasses thrown to the dogs."

President Truman, still hoping to find a solution to the crisis, called a meeting of his National Security Council at the end of June. The facts laid before him were alarming. George McGhee's attempts to sway the Foreign Office and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had failed utterly. Anglo-Iranian had begun evacuating its employees from Abadan, and a complete shutdown of the refinery there was a real possibility. British warships were patrolling ominously offshore. Middle East experts on the National Security Council staff warned in a report that if the oil conflict could not be resolved, "the loss of Iran to the free world is a distinct possibility." Their report asserted that the British were seriously considering invading Iran and warned that such an invasion "might split the free world, would produce a chaotic situation in Iran, and might cause the Iranian Government to turn to the Soviet Union for help."

This left Truman more worried than ever. His fears were heightened by two messages he received in the next few days. The first, from Mossadegh, made clear that Iran and Britain remained on a

collision course. Mossadegh complained about Britain's efforts to sabotage his nationalization project and added ominously, "There is no danger whatever to the security of life and property of the British nationals in Iran. Any spreading of false rumors on the part of the agents of the former oil company might, however, cause anxieties and disturbances."

Mossadegh's warnings arrived in blunter terms on July 1 from Ambassador Grady. In an anguished cable he warned Truman that Iran was in "a most explosive situation" and reported for the first time that Britain was looking for ways to overthrow Mossadegh. "The British, led by Mr. Morrison, seem to be determined to follow the old tactics of getting the government out with which it has difficulties," he wrote. "Mossadegh has the backing of 95 to 98 percent of the people of this country. It is utter folly to try to push him out."

What Grady considered "utter folly" was indeed what the British were planning. They had abandoned all hope of bringing Mossadegh around to their way of thinking and were not prepared to make the concessions he wanted. Ambassador Shepherd wrote in a cable to London that "the moment has come for us to try and get him out," so that Iran would once again have a prime minister who was "reasonable and friendly" rather than "rigid and impractical."

News from The Hague on July 5 further complicated matters. The International Court of Justice, acting at Britain's request, issued an "indication" recommending that Iran allow the oil company to continue functioning as before while negotiations proceeded. Iran had refused to participate in the case. The Court was empowered to adjudicate only disputes between nations, and Iranian officials asserted that since the 1933 oil accord was a deal between Iran and a private company, it had no right to intervene. The Iranian minister at The Hague dismissed its recommendation as "null and void" and "an intervention in our internal affairs."

That steeled Foreign Secretary Morrison's resolve. He marched to the House of Commons and took the floor to declare that the situation in Iran was "becoming intolerable." To assure that Mossadegh understood the intensity of his indignation, he added that the Royal Navy was "lying close to Abadan" and would be ordered into action "should the Persians fail to discharge their responsibilities."

Truman now saw greater peril than ever. To him, the question of who would control Iranian oil was only secondary. He was more worried that the argument between the United States and Britain over how to deal with Mossadegh might spiral out of control and split the Atlantic alliance. Determined to make a last effort at compromise, he wrote to Mossadegh suggesting direct American mediation:

> This matter is so full of dangers to the welfare of your own country, of Great Britain and of all the free world, that I have been giving the most earnest thought to the problems involved. . . . I have watched with concern the breakdown of your discussions and the drift toward a collapse of oil operations with all the attendant losses to Iran and the world. Surely this is a disaster which statesmanship can find a way to avoid. . . .
>
> I lay great stress on the action of the [World] Court. . . . Therefore, I earnestly commend to you a most careful consideration of its suggestion. I suggest that its utterance be thought of not as a decision which is or is not binding depending on technical legal considerations, but as a suggestion of an impartial body dedicated to justice and equity and to a peaceful world. . . .
>
> I have a very sincere desire, Mr. Prime Minister, to be as helpful to you as possible in this circumstance. I have discussed this matter at length with Mr. W. Averell Harriman, who as you know is one of my closest advisors and one of our most eminent citizens. Should you be willing to receive him, I should be happy to have him go to Tehran as my personal representative to talk over with you this immediate and pressing situation.

Averell Harriman was an accomplished diplomat who had served as ambassador to Britain, ambassador to the Soviet Union, and director of the Marshall Plan in Europe. He also knew Mohammad Reza Shah and was thought to have some expertise in matters Iranian. Immediately after Truman told him of his new mission, Harriman received an illustrious delegation at his Washington home: Secretary of State Acheson, Assistant Secretary George McGhee, two other State Department officials, and the British ambassador, Sir Oliver Franks. All agreed that the situation in Iran had become exceedingly dangerous. A small incident at Abadan, they feared, could lead the British to intervene militarily, which

might in turn lead Mossadegh to seek Soviet help. Even if that did not happen, closing the refinery was sure to set off a wave of social and political turmoil.

Harriman's mission faced challenges even before it began. The British disapproved of the whole idea. In an impatient note to Acheson, Foreign Secretary Morrison said that Britain was "in grave difficulties" and needed not more negotiations but "wholehearted support" from the United States. "I must tell you that one of our main difficulties in dealing with this intractable problem has arisen from a belief persistently held by many Persians that there is a difference of opinion between the American and British over the oil question," he wrote. "An approach by a representative of the President would, I fear, merely encourage Dr. Mossadegh in this belief."

This message confirmed Acheson's view that Morrison, as he wrote later, "knew nothing of foreign affairs and had no feel for the situation." He had even less use for Britain's hard-line ambassador in Tehran, Sir Francis Shepherd, whom he considered an "unimaginative disciple of the 'whiff of grapeshot' school of diplomacy." Their dislike was mutual. As soon as Shepherd learned that Acheson was sending an emissary to Tehran to interfere in what he considered his business, he called a news conference to express his "astonishment and chagrin" at the temerity of the Americans.

"What is the use of Harriman flying here?" he asked. "We are not inviting mediation in this matter." This was a highly undiplomatic outburst, and under instructions from the Foreign Office, Shepherd retracted it the next day.

It was in this climate that Ambassador Grady visited Mossadegh to deliver Truman's letter. He wore a white suit and a jaunty tropical hat and waved happily to photographers as he arrived. The bedside meeting, however, did not go well. At Mossadegh's request Grady read the letter aloud, and when he reached the passage in which Truman urged him to accept the Court's advice, Mossadegh broke out into a thirty-second fit of convulsive laughter. When he finally stopped, there was a long moment of silence. Mossadegh finally told Grady that Iran believed the World Court had no jurisdiction in this case. Then he launched into a long and increasingly angry denunciation of the United States, which he said had once upheld moral principles but was wilting in the face of British pressure. His

tirade was so vitriolic that Grady did not even see the point of pressing Harriman's possible visit.

Acheson was much irritated when he received news of this encounter. He sent Grady a sharp note telling him that the Harriman mission was

> the one new positive element contained in the President's proposal and is the step to which the President and I attach greatest significance. I cannot believe that Mossadegh's initial reaction will, upon reflection, be his final one. Considerations of courtesy will lead him, I am convinced, to give President's message full consideration, and to receive President's personal rep who can give both you and Mossadegh the benefit of great thought which President has put to this matter and receive any suggestions which Mossadegh may have. Therefore request that you see Mossadegh again as speedily as possible and in tactful way, which I know you will employ, urge these considerations upon him.

Grady did as he was told, and Acheson's faith in his persuasive powers turned out to have been justified. He convinced Mossadegh that the Harriman mission was in everyone's interest. Harriman arrived in Tehran on July 15, 1951. His welcoming committee consisted of ten thousand enraged Iranians shouting, "Death to Harriman!"

CHAPTER 10

Pull Up Your Socks and Get Going

Excitement surged through the corridors of power in London when news came that Dwight Eisenhower had been elected president of the United States. British leaders had spent many frustrating months trying to persuade Harry Truman to join their campaign against the Iranian government. His steadfast refusals deeply discouraged them, but now the climate in Washington was radically changed. What had come to seem impossible was suddenly very possible indeed.

Over the years, Britain had assembled a formidable network of clandestine agents in Iran. Under the direction of "Monty" Woodhouse, the chief of the British intelligence station in Tehran during the early 1950s, these agents became proficient at everything from bribing politicians to organizing riots. Woodhouse and all other British spies, however, had to leave Iran when Prime Minister Mossadegh shut the embassy from which they worked. They left behind a fine band of subversives.

The principal figures in this underground network were the three extraordinary Rashidian brothers. Their father had made a fortune in shipping, banking, and real estate, and he bequeathed to them not just his wealth but his boundless admiration for all things

British. Beginning in the early 1950s the Secret Intelligence Service paid them £10,000 each month, the equivalent of $28,000, a staggering sum by Iranian standards, to suborn Iranians in what the CIA called "such fields as the armed forces, the Majlis (Iranian parliament), religious leaders, the press, street gangs, politicians and other influential figures."

"Seyfollah, the eldest and a musician and philosopher, was the brains of the triumvirate and a superb conversationalist and host," one historian wrote about the brothers. "He was a student of history and liked to quote Machiavelli. Asadollah was the organizer, political activist and confidante of the Shah, while Qodratollah was the businessman and entrepreneur."

Directors of the Secret Intelligence Service were pained to think that such outstanding agents were going to waste in Iran when there was such urgent business to be done there. Eisenhower's election gave them hope that the Americans would pick up where they had been forced to leave off. Kermit Roosevelt encouraged them further during his visit to London. So eager were they to resume their plotting that they could not even wait for Eisenhower to take office. In mid-November of 1952, less than two weeks after the election, they sent Woodhouse to Washington.

Woodhouse met with his CIA counterparts and with men who would take important posts in the Eisenhower administration. Since he had no love for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company—he considered its directors "stupid, boring, pigheaded and tiresome"—and since he knew that American officials didn't care much about its troubles anyway, he shaped his appeal around the rhetoric of anticommunism:

> I argued that even if a settlement of the oil dispute could be negotiated with Mossadegh, which was doubtful, he was still incapable of resisting a coup by the Tudeh party, if it were backed by Soviet support. Therefore he must be removed. I had with me a draft plan for the purpose. . . .
>
> Two separate components were dovetailed into the plan, because we had two distinct kinds of resources: an urban organization run by the [Rashidian] brothers, and a number of tribal leaders to the south. We intended to activate both simultaneously. The urban organization included senior officers of the army and

police, deputies and senators, mullahs, merchants, newspaper editors and elder statesmen, as well as mob leaders. These forces, directed by the brothers, were to seize control of Tehran, preferably with the support of the Shah but if necessary without it, to arrest Mossadegh and his ministers. At the same time, tribal leaders were to make a show of force in the direction of major cities in the south. . . .

I had obtained the Foreign Office's agreement to a list of fifteen politicians, any one of whom would be acceptable to us as prime minister if he were equally acceptable to the Americans. The list was in three categories, crudely labeled "Old Gang," "New Gang," and "Intermediate." The third category included General Fazlollah Zahedi, who soon emerged in discussion as the figure most likely to be acceptable to both British and American policymakers. I had been in touch with him before we were expelled from Tehran, and it was clear that the Americans were also in touch with him since we had left. He was an ironic choice, for during World War II he had been regarded as a German agent. An operation to kidnap him and put him out of circulation had then been organized by Fitzroy MacLean. Now we were all turning to him as the potential savior of Iran.

Over the course of his meetings in Washington, Woodhouse detected "steadily increasing interest" in his proposal for what the British called "Operation Boot." Frank Wisner, a New York lawyer who had become the CIA's director of operations, was strongly positive. So was Wisner's newly named boss, Allen Dulles. State Department officials were markedly less enthusiastic, but John Foster Dulles would overrule their reluctance as soon as he was sworn in as secretary of state.

By the time Woodhouse flew home, the incoming administration had committed itself, albeit informally, to a covert operation aimed at removing Mossadegh. It had also accepted Britain's nominees to play the two key roles: General Zahedi as Iran's designated savior and Kermit Roosevelt as the CIA field commander who would place him in office. A plan would be ready soon after Eisenhower took office. John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles would win his approval and then do the deed.

The Dulles brothers, whose work was vital to the success of Operation Ajax, were unique in American history. Never before or since have siblings run the overt and covert sides of United States foreign policy simultaneously. During their terms as secretary of state and director of central intelligence, they worked in near-perfect harmony to achieve their common goals. Among the first and most urgent was Mossadegh's overthrow.

Foster and Allie, as the brothers were known, were born into privilege. Their grandfather, John Watson Foster, was secretary of state when they were children, and he often allowed them to meet his guests and eavesdrop on their meetings. During the era of McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, they spent many formative hours in Washington salons and acquired an easy familiarity with the ways of power. Allie, who from childhood displayed what his biographer called "an insatiable curiosity about the people around him," took secret notes on what he heard.

Both brothers attended Princeton and did well, with Foster, the elder by five years, graduating first in his class. Although they were always close, they had quite different personalities. Allie was affable and easygoing. He enjoyed tennis, wine, and elegant parties, and at one point had a mistress who was undergoing analysis by Carl Gustav Jung. Foster was stern and gruff, known for opening and closing meetings with grunts instead of expressions of welcome or thanks. It was said that even his friends didn't like him much.

By the time the brothers had both graduated from Princeton, one of their uncles, Robert Lansing, was Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state. Partly as a result of his influence, they both pursued interests in world affairs. Allie joined the State Department when World War I broke out. He was sent to Bern, which as the capital of neutral Switzerland was a center of émigré life, and then to Berlin and Istanbul, also hotbeds of intrigue. At each post he plunged eagerly into intelligence work. He proved himself highly adept at recruiting informers, debriefing travelers, observing military movements, and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of foreign governments.

While Allie was learning the espionage business, Foster launched his legal career in New York. After he graduated from law school, his grandfather arranged an interview for him at the legendary firm of Sullivan & Cromwell. He was hired as a junior clerk and soon found himself working with one of the most quietly influential groups of men in the world. Sullivan & Cromwell was no

ordinary law firm but a center of international business and finance. Its lawyers were brokers among kings, presidents, and plutocrats, and its clients included many of the world's most important banks and business cartels. Foster dealt directly with many of them, including J. P. Morgan & Company, the International Nickel Company, and the Cuban Sugar Cane Corporation. He distinguished himself as a maker of high-level deals and an expert in international finance. When the firm's managing partner died in 1926, Foster was given the job. One of his first decisions was to recruit his brother.

Allen Dulles was fresh out of law school and had not even been admitted to the bar, but his unusual skills and wide range of contacts made him a great asset to Sullivan & Cromwell, which advertised itself as having "unusual and diversified means of obtaining information." In effect he was an intelligence officer for hire. He enjoyed his work but longed for more excitement. When World War II broke out, he, like Kermit Roosevelt, joined the OSS. He was posted in Europe, where he studied the Nazi intelligence system and worked to penetrate and undermine it.

Foster spent the war years at home, making speeches and publishing articles warning of the threat that Soviet expansionism posed to "the accumulated civilization of these centuries." He became a leading figure in Republican politics. In 1948 he served as the foreign policy adviser to the Republican presidential candidate, Governor Thomas Dewey of New York. Many assumed that he would become secretary of state when Dewey won, but after Dewey's surprising loss to Truman he had to return to his law practice and bide his time. Allen, who rejoined the firm after the war, had dreamed of becoming Dewey's ambassador to France, but that plan, too, was spoiled by the election result.

The Dulles brothers developed a special interest in Iran. Foster always mentioned Iran when he spoke or wrote about countries he believed might soon fall to communism. Allen visited Tehran in 1949 on behalf of a Sullivan & Cromwell client, an engineering firm looking for construction contracts. His trip gave him a chance to observe both the twenty-nine-year-old Shah, whom his wife called "the gloomy prince," and the fiery opposition leader, Mohammad Mossadegh. Later that year, when the Shah visited New York, Allen arranged a "small private dinner" for him and one hundred members of the Council on Foreign Relations.

In 1947 the wartime OSS was transformed into the Central Intelligence Agency. Allen Dulles had many friends in the new agency, and at their request, he wrote a series of secret reports urging it to launch a worldwide program of "covert psychological warfare, clandestine political activity, sabotage and guerrilla activity." Soon after Truman chose General Walter Bedell Smith as the director of central intelligence, Smith brought Dulles into the agency, first as a consultant and then as deputy director.

Allen Dulles was one of the country's most ambitious intelligence experts. John Foster Dulles had become widely known as a world-class international lawyer who moved easily in elite Republican circles. Both reached the pinnacle of power when Eisenhower took office.

"Beedle" Smith stayed with them, moving from the CIA to become undersecretary of state. Smith had been Eisenhower's chief of staff during the war and remained one of his most trusted friends. In his new position, he was ideally placed to assure that the CIA, the State Department, and the White House would work seamlessly on sensitive projects like the coup against Mossadegh.

On a cold day shortly before Eisenhower's inauguration, Smith summoned Kermit Roosevelt for a gruff conversation about Iran. Smith had supported the idea of a coup during the Truman administration, but his superiors overruled him. Now he was eager to proceed. It had been two months since Woodhouse's visit to Washington, and Smith was losing patience.

"When are those ——ing British coming to talk to us?" Smith demanded. "And when is our goddamn operation going to get underway?" Roosevelt assured him that everyone was ready, but it would be unseemly to move before Eisenhower was inaugurated.

"Pull up your socks and get going," Smith told him. "You won't have any trouble in London. They'll jump at anything we propose. And I'm sure you can come up with something sensible enough for Foster to OK. Ike will agree."

Eisenhower was inaugurated on January 20, 1953. Days later, the American ambassador in Tehran, Loy Henderson, began contacting Iranians he thought might be interested in working to overthrow Mossadegh. Like his new bosses in Washington, Henderson

had given up hope for a compromise. In one cable to Washington, he described Mossadegh as "lacking in stability," "clearly dominated by emotions and prejudices," and "not quite sane." In another, he asserted that the National Front was composed of "the street rabble, the extreme left . . . extreme Iranian nationalists, some but not all of the more fanatical religious leaders, [and] intellectual leftists, including many who had been educated abroad and did not realize that Iran was not ready for democracy." He and George Middleton, his British counterpart, took the extraordinary step of composing a joint message to their home offices expressing their shared conclusion that the longer Mossadegh remained in power, the likelier it was that Iran would fall to communism.

Through an emissary, Henderson even opened a channel to General Zahedi, who, he told Dulles in a cable, was "not ideal" but had "more chance of piloting Iran through the turbulent days following Mossadegh's resignation than any other candidate now on the horizon." Zahedi had assured Henderson that if he reached power, he would "take a strong stand toward the Communists." He added, however, that it would be "impossible for Iranians to remove the present government by their own efforts."

Henderson sent a cable to Washington endorsing this view. It was received with great enthusiasm, so much so that Beedle Smith gave it to Eisenhower with a cover note calling it "very accurate." Smith also sent a reply to Henderson telling him that the United States had decided it could "no longer approve of the Mossadegh government and would prefer a successor government." He sent copies of his cable to CIA headquarters in Washington and to the CIA station in Iran. It amounted to a formal, though secret, declaration of war on Mossadegh.

Only one important figure in the Eisenhower administration still hoped for compromise with Mossadegh: President Eisenhower himself. Two weeks before his inauguration, he met with Churchill in New York and did not seem at all interested when Churchill mentioned Iran. In fact, he complained that Britain's efforts to involve the United States in its Iranian troubles had done nothing but "get Mossadegh to accuse us of being a partner in browbeating a weak nation."

Churchill was wise enough not to press his case at that moment. He knew that planning for a coup was already well underway, and

that the Dulles brothers were on his side. In February he dispatched "C," the chief of British intelligence, Sir John Sinclair, to Washington to convey the intensity of his interest.

While Sinclair was in Washington, Iranian tribal leaders who were on the British payroll, working with General Zahedi, launched a short-lived uprising in the southern provinces. Mossadegh suspected the Shah was involved and suggested that he consider leaving Iran until passions cooled. By all accounts including his own, the Shah was more than willing to go. Minister of Court Hussein Ala described him as being in an "almost hysterical state" and on the brink of a "complete nervous breakdown and irrational action."

Mossadegh's foreign-sponsored enemies, however, cleverly turned news of the Shah's planned trip to their advantage. In sermons, street-corner speeches, and newspaper articles, they charged that Mossadegh was forcing the Shah to leave against his will and that his next step would certainly be to abolish the monarchy. They organized a mob to converge on Mossadegh's house on the night of February 28, and as the crowd swelled in size, a jeep carrying an army colonel and one of the most colorful gang leaders in Tehran, Shaban "The Brainless" Jafari, smashed through the front gate. Mossadegh, in his pajamas, was forced to flee over his back garden wall. A British diplomat cabled home that the mob "was certainly organized by Kashani, and was not a spontaneous expression of a loyalty deep-seated or significant enough to stiffen the Shah."

By the next afternoon Tehran was quiet again, partly because the Shah had announced that he was canceling his travel plans. The sudden appearance of a paid mob and its willingness to attack the prime minister, however, contributed to an atmosphere of growing instability. It also gave coup planners more ammunition for their campaign to persuade Eisenhower that Iran was sliding dangerously toward chaos.

Neither Eisenhower nor anyone in his inner circle ever wrote an account of how he came to support the idea of a coup. Evidence suggests, however, that he did so during March, two months after his inauguration. The Dulles brothers seized on the violence that erupted in Tehran on February 28. Even Ambassador Henderson acknowledged that the protest had been organized rather than genuine, but evidently no one told that to Eisenhower. Instead, Allen Dulles sent him an intelligence estimate warning that "the

Iran situation has been slowly disintegrating" and "a Communist takeover is becoming more and more of a possibility."

It was not an easy sell. At a meeting of the National Security Council on March 4, Eisenhower wondered aloud why it wasn't possible "to get some of the people in these down-trodden countries to like us instead of hating us." Secretary of State Dulles did not reply directly, but he delivered a sobering analysis of the situation in Iran. His words, as reported by the official note-taker, suggested that the United States could no longer stand by without acting:

> The probable consequences of the events of the last few days, concluded Mr. Dulles, would be a dictatorship in Iran under Mossadegh. As long as the latter lives there was little danger, but if he were to be assassinated or removed from power, a political vacuum would occur in Iran and the Communists might easily take over. The consequences of such a takeover were then outlined in all their seriousness by Mr. Dulles. Not only would the free world be deprived of the enormous assets represented by Iranian oil production and reserves, but the Russians would secure these assets and thus henceforth be free of any anxiety about their petroleum situation. Worse still, Mr. Dulles pointed out, if Iran succumbed to the Communists there was little doubt that in short order the other areas of the Middle East, with some sixty percent of the world's oil reserves, would fall into Communist control.

Later that week, Foreign Secretary Eden visited Washington. At several of his top-level meetings, Eden broached the subject of Iran and the proposed coup. He found everyone except Eisenhower sympathetic. Alton Jones, the oil executive who had traveled to Iran the year before, was a personal friend of Eisenhower's, and Eisenhower told Eden that he wanted to send Jones back "to make the best arrangement he could to get the oil flowing again." He said he considered Mossadegh "the only hope for the West in Iran," precisely the view Truman had held.

"I would like to give the guy ten million bucks," Eisenhower told the surprised Eden.

Eden tried gently to change Eisenhower's mind, telling him at one point that "we would be better occupied looking for alternatives to Mossadegh, rather than trying to buy him off." In the best diplomatic tradition, however, he left the real work to the intelligence officers he had brought with him. While he spoke softly at the White House, they were honing their plot with comrades at the CIA and the State Department.

The Dulles brothers had developed an excellent sense of how to bring their boss around to their way of thinking. On March 7 John Foster Dulles and Eden issued a joint communiqué saying they had agreed on a new offer that would allow Iran to "retain control of its own oil industry and of its own oil policies." That sounded fine to Eisenhower, but it did not honestly reflect the offer itself, which, like every other one the British had made over the past two years, was based on the premise that they would return to run the Iranian oil industry. Mossadegh rejected it and told Ambassador Henderson that he was disappointed that the Eisenhower administration had "allowed the United Kingdom to formulate United States policies concerning Iran." He made several counterproposals, even offering at one point to submit to mediation by Switzerland or Germany, but the British and their new friends in Washington ignored them.

While Eden was in Washington, the Rashidian brothers were doing their best to stir up trouble in Iran. Partly through their efforts, prominent figures who had been part of Mossadegh's coalition began to turn against him. Ayatollah Kashani, the most outspoken defector, damned Mossadegh with the vitriol he had once reserved for the British. He began using thugs to intimidate his rivals and even pushed a bill through the Majlis pardoning Khalil Tahmasibi, the convicted assassin of Prime Minister Razmara. Other former Mossadegh allies who broke with him to pursue their own agendas included Muzzaffar Baqai, head of the worker-based Toilers party, and Hussein Makki, who had helped lead the takeover of the Abadan refinery and was at one point considered Mossadegh's heir apparent. Robin Zaehner wrote in a report to London that the successful effort to pull Kashani, Baqai, and Makki away from the National Front was "created and directed by the brothers Rashidian."

These defections greatly weakened the National Front and left Mossadegh isolated and vulnerable. They also immeasurably strengthened the Dulles brothers in their effort to persuade President Eisenhower that the time had come for the United States to act. At a National Security Council meeting on March 11, Secretary of State Dulles asserted that Americans must become "senior

partners with the British in this area." Eisenhower expressed no disagreement.

"The President said that he had very real doubts whether, even if we tried unilaterally, we could make a successful deal with Mossadegh," the note-taker at that meeting reported. "He felt that it might not be worth the paper it was written on, and the example might have grave effects on United States oil concessions in other parts of the world."

Eisenhower had come to the conclusion that Iran was collapsing, and that the collapse could not be prevented as long as Mossadegh was in power. He stopped inquiring about the prospects for compromise. Those around him took his change in tone as a sign that he would not resist the idea of a coup. On March 18 Frank Wisner sent a message to his British counterparts saying that the CIA was now prepared to discuss the details of a plot against Mossadegh. Two weeks later, Allen Dulles approved the dispatch of $1 million to the CIA station in Tehran, for use "in any way that would bring about the fall of Mossadegh."

These developments greatly encouraged the British. During April, the Foreign Office formally embraced Operation Ajax. Then, in what amounted to explicit recognition that command was passing from their hands to the Americans, British agents sent word to the Rashidian brothers that they should now work with the CIA.

Iranians connected to the Rashidian network decided that they could push Iran further toward chaos by kidnapping high government officials. Their preferred targets, Foreign Minister Fatemi and General Riahi, the newly appointed chief of staff, traveled with too many bodyguards, so they settled on the Tehran police chief, General Mahmoud Afshartus. Some of the plotters had personal ties to Afshartus, and one invited the chief to his home on April 19. There he was seized, blindfolded, and spirited to a cave outside of town. Police officers identified the kidnappers almost immediately, but as the officers closed in, one of Afshartus's captors shot and killed him.

This murder had the desired effect. It shocked the country and also eliminated a popular officer who might have been a formidable obstacle to the success of the forthcoming coup. General Zahedi, who had resurfaced after treason charges against him were dropped, was implicated in the killing. He took refuge in the Majlis, under Ayatollah Kashani's protection.

Unaware of how decisively the Americans had turned against him, Mossadegh next decided to appeal directly to Eisenhower. In a letter dated May 28 he said that Iranians were "suffering financial hardships and struggling with political intrigues carried on by the former oil company and the British government." They would be deeply grateful for "prompt and effective aid" from the United States, or for American support for a stalled $25-million loan that Mossadegh was seeking from the Export-Import Bank, or at least for permission to sell oil to American companies. Eisenhower took a month to reply. When he did, it was to suggest that Mossadegh could best repair Iran's economy by resolving his dispute with the British:

> The failure of Iran and the United Kingdom to reach an agreement with regard to compensation has handicapped the Government of the United States in its efforts to help Iran. There is a strong feeling in the United States, even among American citizens most sympathetic to Iran and friendly to the Iranian people, that it would not be fair to the American taxpayers for the United States Government to extend any considerable amount of economic aid to Iran so long as Iran could have access to funds derived from the sale of its oil. . . . I note the concern reflected in your letter at the present dangerous situation in Iran, and sincerely hope that before it is too late, the Government of Iran will take such steps as are in its power to prevent a further deterioration in that situation.

This letter told Mossadegh what Eisenhower's intimates already knew: that the new administration had reversed American policy toward Iran. No longer would there be efforts to make the best of the situation, as under Truman, and no longer would there be criticism of the British for favoring a coup. In fact, by the time Eisenhower sent his reply to Mossadegh, both men knew what was afoot.

Eisenhower had already given tacit approval to the coup plot, but because of its momentous scope, tacit approval was not enough. On June 14 Allen Dulles went to the White House to brief him. Sensing the president's desire not to know too much, Dulles gave him only what Kermit Roosevelt called "the most 'broad brush' outline of what was proposed." That was all Eisenhower needed, and he gave his blessing. Around the same time Churchill gave his own secret—and much more enthusiastic—approval.

Planning for the plot was already quite advanced by the time Eisenhower and Churchill formally endorsed it. Two veteran intelligence officers, one American and one British, had met in Cyprus to draw up a detailed blueprint. Both were old Iran hands. The CIA man was Donald Wilber, who had worked for years as an archaeologist and an architect in the Middle East, served in Iran during World War II as an OSS agent, and then divided his time between advanced studies at Princeton and work as a consultant to the CIA specializing in psychological warfare. In 1952 Wilber had spent six months running the CIA's "political action" office in Tehran, an assignment that gave him a firsthand view of political and military factions favoring and opposing Mossadegh. His British counterpart, Norman Darbyshire, had served extended tours of duty in Iran and worked closely with Robin Zaehner. When the British intelligence station in Tehran was forced to close, it was moved to Cyprus and Darbyshire was named to head it.

These two agents, now working for governments that shared the same goal in Iran, struck up a close working relationship, as a CIA history of the coup—written by Wilber himself—later reported:

> It soon became apparent that Dr. Wilber and Mr. Darbyshire held quite similar views of Iranian personalities and had made very similar estimates of the factors involved in the Iranian political scene. There was no friction or marked difference of opinion during the discussions. It also quickly became apparent that the SIS was perfectly content to follow whatever lead was taken by the Agency. It seemed obvious to Wilber that the British were very pleased at having obtained the active cooperation of the Agency and were determined to do nothing which might jeopardize US participation. At the same time there was faint envy expressed over the fact that the Agency was better equipped in the way of funds, personnel and facilities than was SIS.

Wilber and Darbyshire agreed that although General Zahedi had his weaknesses, he was the only Iranian with enough "vigor and courage" to rally opposition forces. Their plan to place him in power, which would be altered several times before the blow was struck, was carefully considered and straightforward:

- Through a variety of means, covert agents would manipulate public opinion and turn as many Iranians as possible against Mossadegh. This effort, for which $150,000 was budgeted, would "create, extend and enhance public hostility and distrust and fear of Mossadegh and his government." It would portray Mossadegh as corrupt, pro-communist, hostile to Islam, and bent on destroying the morale and readiness of the armed forces.
- While Iranian agents spread these lies, thugs would be paid to launch "staged attacks" on religious leaders and make it appear that they were ordered by Mossadegh or his supporters.
- Meanwhile, General Zahedi would persuade and bribe as many of his fellow officers as possible to stand ready for whatever military action was necessary to carry out the coup. He was to be given $60,000, later increased to $135,000, to "win additional friends" and "influence key people."
- A similar effort, for which $11,000 per week was budgeted, would be launched to suborn members of the Majlis.
- On the morning of "coup day," thousands of paid demonstrators would stage a massive antigovernment rally. The well-prepared Majlis would respond with a "quasi-legal" vote to dismiss Mossadegh. If he resisted, army units under Zahedi's control would arrest him and his key supporters, and then seize military command posts, police stations, telephone and telegraph offices, radio stations, and the national bank.

Working closely with comrades in Washington and Tehran, with whom they were in constant contact over a Cyprus-based radio network, Wilber and Darbyshire finished this blueprint at the end of May. On June 3 Ambassador Henderson arrived in Washington to be briefed on its contents. He stayed to attend a crucial meeting on June 25, at which plans for the coup were laid out in detail.

President Eisenhower did not wish to hear details of covert operations and so did not attend this meeting. His closest foreign policy advisers, however, were all there. The meeting was held in John Foster Dulles's office at the State Department. When the plotters had assembled, Dulles picked up the report Wilber and Darbyshire had written and said, "So this is how we get rid of that madman Mossadegh!"

Kermit Roosevelt explained how he proposed to carry out the

coup, and when he was finished, Dulles asked the others what they thought. Allen Dulles and Beedle Smith endorsed the plan without reservation. So did Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson. Two senior State Department officials—Henry Byroade, the assistant secretary for Middle East affairs, and Robert Bowie, the director of the policy planning staff—went along with slightly less enthusiasm, certainly realizing that they would not remain in their jobs long if they dissented. When it was Henderson's turn to speak, he said he had no love for "this kind of business," but that in this case "we have no choice."

"That's that, then," Secretary of State Dulles said with an uncharacteristic grin. "Let's get going."

With this unanimous vote, the United States gave its final go-ahead for Operation Ajax, or Operation Boot, as the British continued to call it. The governments in London and Washington were finally united in their enthusiasm. One looked forward to recovering its oil concession. The other saw a chance to deliver a devastating blow against communism.

There was dissent from this new unity. Some of it came from career diplomats like Charles Bohlen, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union, who subjected one British diplomat in Washington to what the diplomat called "an emotional tirade" against the planned coup. Several CIA officers also opposed the idea. One of them was Roger Goiran, the chief of the CIA station in Tehran.

Goiran had built a formidable intelligence network, known by the code name Bedamn, that was engaged in propaganda activities aimed at blackening the image of the Soviet Union in Iran. It also stood ready to launch a nationwide campaign of subversion and sabotage in case of a communist coup. The Bedamn network consisted of more than one hundred agents and had an annual budget of $1 million—quite considerable, in light of the fact that the CIA's total worldwide budget for covert operations was just $82 million. Now Goiran was being asked to use his network in a coup against Mossadegh. He believed that this would be a great mistake and warned that if the coup was carried out, Iranians would forever view the United States as a supporter of what he called "Anglo-French colonialism." His opposition was so resolute that Allen Dulles had to remove him from his post.

While Allen Dulles marshaled resources for Operation Ajax,

John Foster Dulles became its most enthusiastic cheerleader. He followed the preparations with delight and also great impatience. At one point he became alarmed when Iran was discussed at a high-level meeting but no mention was made of the planned coup. The next morning he telephoned his brother at the CIA to ask anxiously whether something had gone wrong. According to a memo of their conversation: "The Secy called and said in your talk about Iran yesterday at the meeting you did not mention the other matter, is it off? AWD said he doesn't talk about it, it was cleared directly with the President, and is still active. . . . AWD said it is moving along reasonably well."

Thus reassured that the plot was afoot, Secretary of State Dulles confined his public statements to generalized laments about the course of events in Iran. His comment at a news conference in July might have been read as a warning couched in highly diplomatic language. "Recent developments in Iran, especially the growing activity of the illegal Communist party, which appears to be tolerated by the Iranian government, have caused us concern," he said. "These developments make it more difficult for the United States to give assistance to Iran so long as the government tolerates this sort of activity."

By the time Kermit Roosevelt entered Iran on July 19, the country was aflame. Mossadegh's supporters in the Majlis had voted to remove Ayatollah Kashani from his position as speaker, and the resulting clash led more than half the deputies to resign. Demonstrations demanding dissolution of the Majlis shook Tehran. Mossadegh announced that he would hold a referendum on the question and pledged to resign if voters did not vote to oust the existing Majlis. The referendum, hurriedly convened at the beginning of August, was a disastrous parody of democracy. There were separate ballot boxes for yes and no votes, and the announced result was over 99 percent in favor of throwing out the Majlis. The transparent unfairness of this referendum was more grist for the anti-Mossadegh mill.

Mid-August found Roosevelt and his team of Iranian agents in place and ready to strike. They had pushed Iran to the brink of chaos. Newspapers and religious leaders were screaming for Mossadegh's head. Protests and riots organized by the CIA had turned the streets into battlegrounds. Antigovernment propaganda,

in Donald Wilber's words, "poured off the Agency's presses and was rushed by air to Tehran." Mossadegh was isolated and weaker than ever. Against this background, Roosevelt had every reason to be confident when he sent Colonel Nasiri into action on August 15. He had laid his plans so carefully that when he awoke the next day to find that his coup had failed, he decided to try again.

CHAPTER 11

I Knew It! They Love Me!

A sharp knock on the door of an apartment in one of Tehran's northern suburbs brought two audacious co-conspirators together for the first time. One was the most wanted man in Iran. The other would have been even more wanted if the police knew he existed.

Kermit Roosevelt had much to worry about as he knocked. The night before, he and his men had failed in an attempt to overthrow Prime Minister Mossadegh. His superiors at the CIA in Washington were urging him to flee. Roosevelt, however, had resolved to risk a second attempt.

Extra police officers were on the street that Sunday morning, August 16, 1953. Sirens wailed as security agents swooped down on conspirators implicated in the abortive coup. Roosevelt drove carefully, stopped at red lights, and arrived at General Zahedi's apartment without incident.

By this hour Zahedi had hoped to be prime minister. Instead, he was a hunted fugitive. If he had any hope of success now or even of saving his skin, it lay with Roosevelt. Zahedi knew who must be knocking and opened the door himself.

Roosevelt skipped the pleasantries. He had come to ask just one

court follows my suggestion, to three years of house arrest in his village. After that he will be free to move about in, but not outside, that village. Riahi will spend three years in jail and will then be released to do as he pleases—*if* what he pleases is not objectionable. A few others will get similar punishment. There is one exception. Hussein Fatemi cannot be found yet, but he will be. He was the most vituperative of them all. He urged on the Tudeh gangs that pulled down statues of me and my father. When we find him, he will be executed."

Roosevelt said nothing in reply. A few moments later Prime Minister Zahedi was escorted in. He bowed to the Shah and smiled broadly at Roosevelt, who repeated that the new regime owed nothing to the United States since "the outcome is full repayment."

"We understand," Zahedi answered. "We thank you and will always be grateful."

The three people in that palace room were among the few who had any idea how Operation Ajax was engineered. They took a silent moment to share their satisfaction. "We were all smiles now," Roosevelt wrote afterward. "Warmth and friendship filled the room."

After a few minutes, the Shah rose to escort Roosevelt back to his car. On the way out he reached into his jacket, pulled out a gold cigarette case, and presented it to his guest "as a souvenir of our recent adventure." Then, unexpectedly, a barrel-chested military officer appeared. It was Colonel Nasiri, who had played key roles in both the failed coup on Saturday and the successful one four days later.

"I have made only one promotion," the Shah said. "I present you now to *General* Nasiri."

It was after one o'clock in the morning when Roosevelt returned to the embassy compound. Ambassador Henderson was waiting for him. Henderson had arranged for Roosevelt's departure later that morning, aboard the naval attaché's plane to Bahrain.

Roosevelt barely slept. Soon after dawn he was driven to a remote hangar at the Tehran airport. Several of the men with whom he had carried out the coup were there to send him off. "I stumbled onto the plane," he wrote later, "with tears in my eyes."

CHAPTER 12

Purring Like a Giant Cat

A few days after Mossadegh surrendered to the new regime, a platoon of soldiers appeared at his suite in the Officers Club. The new prime minister, Fazlollah Zahedi, had ordered him transferred to a military prison. There he remained for ten weeks while an indictment was drawn up. When it was ready, Mossadegh was brought before a military tribunal and charged with treason for having resisted the Shah's dismissal order and for "inciting the people to armed insurrection." He defended himself vigorously, asserting that the *firman* had been delivered as part of a midnight coup d'etat and was in any case illegal, since Iranian prime ministers could not be dismissed without a no-confidence vote in the Majlis.

"My only crime," Mossadegh told his judges, "is that I nationalized the Iranian oil industry and removed from this land the network of colonialism and the political and economic influence of the greatest empire on earth."

The guilty verdict was a foregone conclusion. Along with it came the sentence: three years in prison, followed by house arrest for life. Mossadegh served the full prison term and upon his release in the summer of 1956 was brought to his home in Ahmad Abad.

One morning soon after his arrival, the new secret police, called Savak, organized a crude maneuver to impress upon him the terms of his incarceration. A gang of thugs turned up in front of his home, and they began shouting violent anti-Mossadegh slogans. At their head was none other than the gang leader Shaban the Brainless, who had become one of the regime's favorite enforcers. For a time the mob seemed ready to storm the house. It retreated after one of Mossadegh's grandsons fired several rifle shots into the air from inside. Several minutes later two Savak officers arrived and asked to see the prisoner. They carried a letter for him to sign. It was a request that Savak agents be assigned to protect him. Mossadegh, who understood the realities of power, signed it without protest. Within an hour Savak agents took up posts outside and inside the walled complex where he lived. Their standing orders, which did not change for the rest of Mossadegh's life, were to allow no one other than relatives and a few close friends to visit him.

In the weeks following the coup, most of Mossadegh's cabinet ministers and prominent supporters were arrested. Some were later released without charge. Others served prison terms after being convicted of various offenses. Six hundred military officers loyal to Mossadegh were also arrested, and about sixty of them were shot. So were several student leaders at Tehran University. Tudeh and the National Front were banned, and their most prominent supporters were either imprisoned or killed.

Hussein Fatemi, who had been Mossadegh's foreign minister, was the most prominent figure singled out for exemplary punishment. Fatemi was a zealous antimonarchist, and during the turbulent days of August 1953 he had attacked the Shah, whom he called "the Baghdad fugitive," with special venom. Iran had fallen into its misery, Fatemi asserted at one point, because "for the last ten years a dirty, hateful and shameful royal court has been the servant of the British embassy." In one speech he addressed the absent monarch: "O traitor Shah, you shameless person, you have completed the criminal history of the Pahlavi regime! The people want revenge. They want to drag you from behind your desk to the gallows." Now that the tables were turned, the Shah had his chance, and he did not miss it. Just as he had promised Kermit Roosevelt, he arranged for Fatemi to be summarily tried, convicted of treason, and executed.

Fatemi had once compared the Shah to a snake "who bites mortally when the opportunity presents itself." In the end he was among those who suffered the deadly bite. Because of his fate, and also because he was the only member of Mossadegh's inner circle who was a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, his memory is honored in Iran today. One of the main boulevards in Tehran is Dr. Hussein Fatemi Avenue.

In the years after Mossadegh fell from power, Mohammad Reza Shah made him a nonperson about whom it was considered unseemly to speak. Little could be published about him, and nothing at all that was positive. In 1962, having consolidated his increasingly repressive regime, the Shah allowed the National Front to emerge from its illegality and hold a rally, on the condition that each speaker mention Mossadegh's name just once. One hundred thousand people turned out. They knew the stipulation the Shah had placed on speakers, and when each mentioned Mossadegh the allotted one time, they let out a thunderous cheer. That was the last time the Shah allowed the National Front to gather in public.

Mossadegh's wife died in 1965, and although she had stayed in Tehran during the years he was at Ahmad Abad, they remained very close and her death severely affected him. In a letter to a friend he wrote that he was "deeply in pain from this tragedy . . . and now I pray God to take me soon, too, and relieve me of this pathetic existence." Several months later he developed an ailment that was diagnosed as throat cancer. Mohammad Reza Shah sent him a message suggesting that he seek treatment abroad, but Mossadegh refused and chose an Iranian medical team instead. He traveled to Tehran with a police escort and spent several months there under medical treatment. Doctors succeeded in removing his tumor but then subjected him to heavy doses of cobalt. That may have done more harm than good. His health continued to decline. On March 5, 1967, at the age of eighty-five, he died. No public funeral or other expression of mourning was permitted.

The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which later changed its name to British Petroleum, tried to return to its old position in Iran, but public opinion was so opposed that the new government could not permit it. Besides, the logic of power dictated that since the United States had done the dirty work of overthrowing Mossadegh, American companies should share the spoils. Ultimately, an international consortium was organized to assume the rich concession. Anglo-

Iranian held 40 percent of the shares, five American companies together held another 40, and the remainder was distributed to Royal Dutch/Shell and Compagnie Française de Pétroles. The non-British companies paid Anglo-Iranian $1 billion for their 60 percent of the concession. Although the consortium was run by foreigners, it retained the name Mossadegh gave it—National Iranian Oil Company—to preserve the façade of nationalization. It agreed to share its profits with Iran on a fifty-fifty basis but not to open its books to Iranian auditors or to allow Iranians onto its board of directors.

In the years that followed, Mohammad Reza Shah became increasingly isolated and dictatorial. He crushed dissent by whatever means necessary and spent huge amounts of money on weaponry—$10 billion in the United States alone between 1972 and 1976. He had that amount of free cash because of the sharp increase in oil prices during those years. The $4 billion that Iran received from the consortium in 1973 reached $19 billion just two years later.

On the rare occasions when he mentioned Mossadegh, the Shah was contemptuous of his "infantile xenophobia" and "strident nationalism." He told one friend: "The worst years of my reign, indeed of my entire life, came when Mossadegh was prime minister. The bastard was out for blood, and every morning I awoke with the sensation that today might be my last on the throne."

When Iranians' anger began boiling over in the late 1970s, the Shah found that since he had crushed all legitimate political parties and other opposition groups, there was no one with whom he could negotiate a compromise. In desperation, he named a prime minister, Shapour Bakhtiar, who had been deputy minister of labor in Mossadegh's government. The Shah must have felt history's breath on his neck when Bakhtiar visited Mossadegh's grave in Ahmad Abad immediately after taking office, made a speech there pledging fidelity to "Mossadegh's ideals", named a government made up largely of National Front sympathizers, and placed a photo of Mossadegh behind him whenever he addressed the press. At that point, however, doom was so close that the Shah had no choice but to accept such effrontery.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who as a young mullah had strongly opposed Mossadegh, emerged in the late 1970s as Mohammad Reza Shah's most potent enemy. The Shah had sent him into exile in 1964, but from Turkey, Iraq, and finally Paris, he continued preaching his fundamentalist message. When Bakhtiar became prime minister, Khomeini scorned and denounced him. "Why do you talk of the Shah, Mossadegh, money?" he demanded in one radio speech. "These have already passed. Islam is all that remains."

In one of the most stunning political collapses of the twentieth century, the Shah was forced to flee his homeland in January 1979. This time the CIA was not able to return him to his throne. The next year he died in Egypt, reviled by almost everyone. Ayatollah Khomeini replaced him as the arbiter of Iran's destiny.

Men associated with Mossadegh and his ideals dominated Khomeini's first government. The prime minister was Mehdi Bazargan, whom Mossadegh had dispatched to Abadan in 1951 to run the refinery there after the British departed. Ibrahim Yazdi, the head of a small political party dedicated to preserving Mossadegh's legacy, became deputy prime minister and then foreign minister. In the first postrevolutionary election, Khomeini permitted another Mossadegh admirer, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, to run for and win the presidency.

For a brief period after the revolution, it seemed that from the grave, Mossadegh was returning to power. The high school in Ahmad Abad was named after him. So was the main street in Tehran, which had formerly been Pahlavi Avenue. A commemorative stamp was issued in his honor. On March 5, 1979, the twelfth anniversary of his death, an enormous crowd flooded into Ahmad Abad. It was one of the largest gatherings in modern Iranian history. People had to park their cars miles away and walk the rest of the distance. President Bani-Sadr led the tributes and announced plans to move Mossadegh's body to a mausoleum in Tehran. The family demurred, wisely suspecting that if political tides changed, the mausoleum might be desecrated.

These tributes to Mossadegh were in part an effort by Iranians to give him the homage they had not been permitted to give while the Shah was in power. They were also intended as a message to Ayatollah Khomeini and his mullahs. By celebrating Mossadegh, Iranians were expressing their wish for a regime like his: nationalist, democratic, and based on the rule of law. It soon became clear that Khomeini had not the slightest intention of establishing such a

regime. He had broadened his mass appeal by embracing supporters of the National Front, but as soon as he consolidated power, he pushed them out. Before long, he began arresting them. Among those who had to flee the country to save their lives was Hedayat Matine-Daftary, the only one of Mossadegh's grandchildren who had been bold enough to venture into politics.

The window that had been opened for Mossadegh's admirers was now closed. Tehran's main street was renamed again, this time in honor of the Twelfth Imam. Mossadegh's secularism was as abhorrent to the new regime as his democratic vision had been to the old one. The mullahs, like Mohammad Reza Shah before them, came to realize that allowing Iranians to honor Mossadegh would inevitably lead to calls for a government based on his principles. That they could not tolerate, and so they did all they could to suppress his memory.

The men who organized and carried out the 1953 coup soon scattered. General Zahedi, the prime minister who replaced Mossadegh, pleased the Shah with his repressive campaign against nationalists and leftists. Before long, however, the two men had a falling out. Zahedi, like Mossadegh, was a strong figure who believed that prime ministers should be free to run their own governments. The ambitious Shah could not abide that. Just two years after the coup, he forced Zahedi from office and later sent him abroad as ambassador to the United Nations office in Geneva. He died there in 1963.

Zahedi's son Ardeshir, whose quick wits and perfect English made him a valuable asset to the coup plotters, went on to a long and successful career. Although he was still in his midtwenties when his father became prime minister, he quickly emerged as a highly influential figure, serving simultaneously as his father's closest adviser and as a chamberlain to the Shah. His influence did not diminish after his father's fall, and in 1957 he married the Shah's eldest daughter, Princess Shahnaz. Wary of his growing power, the Shah sent him off to golden exile as ambassador to Great Britain, where those who knew of his role in the coup embraced him. Later he returned to Tehran for a term as foreign minister and then became the ambassador to the United States. In that post he

defended the Shah to the bitter end. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, he moved to a villa in Switzerland. He never admitted his role in the coup and even published a rambling article asserting that the CIA was not involved either.

"Mossadegh's fall was not due to any dirty tricks the CIA might have played," he wrote. "My father never had any meetings with CIA agents."

Asadollah Rashidian, whose subversive network of journalists, politicians, mullahs, and gang leaders was crucial to the success of Operation Ajax, prospered in the years that followed. He and his brothers remained in Tehran, and his business ventures flourished under the Shah's patronage. His home became a salon at which politicians and other influential figures spent many evenings discussing the nation's future. Several times the Shah used him as a secret emissary to foreign governments. In the mid-1960s, however, the Shah became uncomfortable with the presence in Tehran of such a sophisticated and well-connected figure, especially one who knew so many secrets. Rashidian sensed this and moved to his beloved England to live out his remaining years in comfort.

Not everyone who helped stage the coup was lucky enough to live into retirement. One to whom the Shah was especially ungrateful was General Nasiri, the officer who led the first, unsuccessful coup against Mossadegh and who also played an important role in the one that succeeded. For years after Mossadegh's defeat, Nasiri served faithfully as commander of the Imperial Guard. He did the Shah's bidding so willingly and discreetly that in 1965 he was placed in charge of the brutally repressive Savak. In that post he did the Shah's dirtiest work without complaint for more than a decade. Enemies of the Shah accused him of horrific crimes. When they began their final drive to power in the late 1970s, the Shah sought to placate them by removing Nasiri from office. Later, claiming to be shocked at reports that Savak had employed torturers, the Shah threw his old friend into prison. Soon after the 1979 revolution, mullahs dispatched Nasiri to a firing squad. Tehran newspapers published photos of his bloody corpse.

Mossadegh's loyal chief of staff, General Riahi, spent a year in prison after the coup and then returned to his original profession, engineering. After the 1979 revolution, he became minister of defense. He served for a few months, until the tide of radicalism

overwhelmed Mehdi Bazargan's government, and then returned to private life until his death several years later in Tehran.

The Shah gave Shaban the Brainless, the most famous leader of the mob that rampaged through Tehran during the fateful days of August 1953, a yellow Cadillac convertible. He became a familiar figure on the streets of Tehran, driving slowly around town with a pistol on each hip, ready to jump out and attack anyone who seemed pro-Mossadegh or anti-Shah. Savak agents called on him from time to time when they wanted someone beaten or otherwise intimidated. After the Islamic Revolution, Shaban moved to Los Angeles and published a memoir denying that he had done much of what Iranians had seen him do.

Princess Ashraf, the Shah's strong-willed twin sister, became something of an international celebrity in the years after her brother was returned to his throne. For a time she served as chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, where she defended his regime against what she called "unsubstantiated allegations of widespread tortures and killings by Savak." By her own account, her life was unhappy, marked by three failed marriages and the shock of her son's murder in Paris after the Islamic Revolution, evidently at the hands of killers dispatched from Tehran. After the revolution, comforted by her share of the billions of dollars her family had spirited out of Iran over the years, she took up residence in New York. In a memoir she admitted that there had been such a thing as Operation Ajax and even put its cost at $1 million, but denied what other participants reported about her role.

Monty Woodhouse, the British agent whose clandestine mission to Washington in January 1952 laid the groundwork for what was then called Operation Boot, returned after its success and had a friendly chat with Allen Dulles. "That was a nice little egg you laid when you were here last time," Dulles told him. Woodhouse was later elevated to the peerage as Lord Terrington. He became a Conservative member of Parliament and the chief editor of Penguin Books. His great passion in later life was the history of Greece and Byzantium, about which he wrote extensively. He also wrote a memoir in which he spoke frankly about both his role in the Iran coup and the coup's aftermath.

"It is easy to see Operation Boot as the first step towards the Iranian catastrophe of 1979," Woodhouse conceded. "What we did

not foresee was that the Shah would gather new strength and use it so tyrannically, nor that the US government and the Foreign Office would fail so abjectly to keep him on a reasonable course. At the time we were simply relieved that a threat to British interests had been removed."

Herbert Morrison, the British foreign secretary whose belligerence helped set his country on a collision course with Iran, retired from politics in 1959 at the age of seventy-one and was named to a life peerage. In his later years he seemed scarcely to remember the passion with which he had denounced Mossadegh and defended the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. His autobiography includes detailed accounts of his role creating the National Fire Service and passing the Road Traffic Act of 1930, but he devoted less than a page to Iran. He asserted that he had favored "sharp and forceful action" against Mossadegh, but that Prime Minister Attlee refused to approve an invasion because it "would take a lot of time and might therefore be a failure."

Attlee wrote in his memoir that choosing Morrison as foreign secretary was "the worst appointment I ever made." He never regretted his decision not to go to war in Iran. "Such action would no doubt have been taken in former times, but would, in the modern world, have outraged opinion at home and abroad," he wrote. "In my view, the day is past when commercial undertakings from industrialized countries, having obtained some concession, can carry on their business without regard to the feelings of the people of the country in which they are operating. . . . The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company showed a lack of sensitivity in not realizing this."

Winston Churchill's biographers have paid almost no attention to his central role in the coup against Mossadegh. Most books about him do not even mention it. Churchill once said privately that he considered the coup to have been "the finest operation since the end of the war," but he never considered it more than an obscure footnote to his career.

The chief hero or villain of the piece, Kermit Roosevelt, went on to an oddly undistinguished career. On his way home from Tehran after the coup, he stopped in London and gave Churchill a private briefing. "Young man," Churchill told him when he finished, "if I had been but a few years younger, I would have loved nothing better than to have served under your command in this great venture." A

few days later Roosevelt repeated his briefing at the White House for President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and a small group of other senior officials. Soon afterward, at a secret ceremony, Eisenhower awarded him the National Security Medal.

Roosevelt concluded his White House briefing by warning that the CIA should not take his success in Iran to mean that it could now overthrow governments at will. The Dulles brothers, however, took it to mean exactly that. They were already plotting to strike against the left-leaning regime in Guatemala and asked Roosevelt to lead their coup. He declined. In 1958 he left the CIA. After spending six years with Gulf Oil, he struck out on a series of moderately successful consulting and lobbying ventures. He died in 2000, still considering August 1953 to have been the highlight of his life. Until his dying day, he believed fervently that the coup he had engineered was right and necessary.

Was it? There can, of course, be no final answer to this crucial question. A host of factors influence the course of history, and drawing conclusions about causes and effects is always dangerous. Nonetheless, few would deny that the 1953 coup in Iran set off a series of unintended consequences. Its most direct result was to give Mohammad Reza Shah the chance to become dictator. He received enormous amounts of aid from the United States—more than $1 billion in the decade following the coup—but his oppressive rule turned Iranians against him. In 1979 their anger exploded in a shattering revolution led by Islamic fundamentalists.

Soon after the Shah was overthrown, President Jimmy Carter allowed him to enter the United States. That sent Iranian radicals into a frenzy of rage. With the blessing of their new leaders, they stormed the American embassy in Tehran and held fifty-two American diplomats hostage for more than fourteen months. Westerners, and especially Americans, found this crime not only barbaric but inexplicable. That was because almost none of them had any idea of the responsibility the United States bore for imposing the royalist regime that Iranians came to hate so passionately. The hostage-takers remembered that when the Shah fled into exile in 1953, CIA agents working at the American embassy had returned him to his throne. Iranians feared that history was about to repeat itself.

"In the back of everybody's mind hung the suspicion that, with the admission of the Shah to the United States, the countdown for another coup d'etat had begun," one of the hostage-takers explained years later. "Such was to be our fate again, we were convinced, and it would be irreversible. We now had to reverse the irreversible."

The hostage episode changed the course of American political history and poisoned relations between Iran and the United States. It led the United States to support Iraq in its long and horrific war with Iran, in the process consolidating the Iraqi dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Within Iran, it strengthened the most militant elements in the revolutionary coalition. One of Ayatollah Khomeini's closest advisers, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who later succeeded him as the country's supreme leader, justified the regime's radicalism by declaring, "We are not liberals like Allende and Mossadegh, whom the CIA can snuff out."

Fundamentalist clerics who consolidated power in Iran during the early 1980s not only imposed a form of religious fascism at home but turned their country into a center for the propagation of terror abroad. Their support for the hostage-takers who seized American diplomats in Tehran was only the beginning of their fierce anti-Western campaign. Soon afterward, they began financing and arming Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Middle Eastern factions known for their involvement in political kidnapping and assassination. They sent agents around the world to kill scores of Iranian dissidents and other perceived enemies, among them former prime minister Shapour Bakhtiar. American investigators implicated them in both the 1983 suicide bombing that killed 214 American marines in Beirut and the 1996 attack that killed another 19 marines in Saudi Arabia. Prosecutors in Argentina asserted that they ordered one of the most heinous anti-Semitic crimes of the post-Holocaust era, the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, which took ninety-three lives.

With their devotion to radical Islam and their eagerness to embrace even the most horrific kinds of violence, Iran's revolutionary leaders became heroes to fanatics in many countries. Among those who were inspired by their example were Afghans who founded the Taliban, led it to power in Kabul, and gave Osama bin-Laden the base from which he launched devastating terror attacks. It is not far-fetched to draw a line from Operation Ajax through the

Shah's repressive regime and the Islamic Revolution to the fireballs that engulfed the World Trade Center in New York.

The world has paid a heavy price for the lack of democracy in most of the Middle East. Operation Ajax taught tyrants and aspiring tyrants there that the world's most powerful governments were willing to tolerate limitless oppression as long as oppressive regimes were friendly to the West and to Western oil companies. That helped tilt the political balance in a vast region away from freedom and toward dictatorship.

As a postrevolutionary generation came of age in Iran, Iranian intellectuals began assessing the long-term effects of the 1953 coup. Several published thoughtful essays that raised intriguing questions. One appeared in an American foreign-policy journal:

> It is a reasonable argument that but for the coup, Iran would be a mature democracy. So traumatic was the coup's legacy that when the Shah finally departed in 1979, many Iranians feared a repetition of 1953, which was one of the motivations for the student seizure of the U.S. embassy. The hostage crisis, in turn, precipitated the Iraqi invasion of Iran, while the [Islamic] revolution itself played a part in the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan. A lot of history, in short, flowed from a single week in Tehran. . . .
>
> The 1953 coup and its consequences [were] the starting point for the political alignments in today's Middle East and inner Asia. With hindsight, can anybody say the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was inevitable? Or did it only become so once the aspirations of the Iranian people were temporarily expunged in 1953?

From the vantage point of history, it is easy to see the catastrophic effects of Operation Ajax. They will continue to plague the world for many years. But what would have been the effect of *not* launching the coup? President Truman insisted until his last day in office that the United States must not intervene in Iran. What if President Eisenhower had also held this view?

Those who defend the coup argue that the Soviet Union was waiting for a chance to strike against Iran. They say that a preemptive coup was necessary because rolling back a Soviet takeover would have been very difficult and perhaps impossible. In their view, the gamble that the Soviets would not act, or that their action could be reversed, was too risky.

"It was a question of much bigger policy than Iran," John Waller, one of the last surviving veterans of Operation Ajax, asserted decades later. "It was about what the Soviets had done and what we knew about their future plans. It's interesting to see what Russia put on its priority list, what it wanted. Iran was very high on it. If anybody wasn't worried about the Soviet menace, I don't know what they could have been believing in. It was a real thing."

Sam Falle, who as a young British diplomat accompanied Monty Woodhouse on his mission to Washington and was later posted in Tehran, held to the same conclusion. In his memoir he wrote that the coup "was of course immoral" because it constituted interference in the internal affairs of a foreign country. But he added, "1952 was a very dangerous time. The Cold War was hot in Korea. The Soviet Union had tried to take all Berlin in 1948. Stalin was still alive. On no account could the Western powers risk a Soviet takeover of Iran, which would almost certainly have led to World War III."

History casts some doubt on these fears. Stalin had tried during the late 1940s to subvert Iran through a combination of military and political means, and for a time his soldiers actually controlled a large swath of northern Iran. Diplomatic pressure from Washington and Tehran forced him to withdraw. This suggests that the Soviets might have been reluctant to try again.

After Stalin's death in early 1953, a regime emerged in the Kremlin that adopted a less aggressive foreign policy. It was not clear at the time, however, that this would be the case. A reckless brute like Beria might have come to power rather than the relatively moderate Khrushchev, and he might have been ready to launch even the most provocative expansionist adventures. This was a danger the CIA believed it could not ignore.

Another open question is the strength of the pro-Soviet Tudeh party during the early 1950s. The Dulles brothers claimed that Tudeh had assembled a vast network that was ready to seize power as soon as Mossadegh fell or was pushed from office. Scholars who have studied Tudeh and its allied organizations doubt this. Tudeh was divided between intellectuals who opposed Mossadegh because they saw him as an obstacle to communism and a mass base made up largely of people who admired him. It had cells in the army and civil service, but they may not have been as large or influential as they were made to seem. Long after the coup, a scholar interviewed

the American diplomat who specialized in monitoring Tudeh during the early 1950s, along with two CIA agents who were posted with him at the United States embassy in Tehran. They admitted "that the Tudeh was really not very powerful, and that higher-level U.S. officials routinely exaggerated its strength and Mossadegh's reliance on it."

The crucial question of whether the American coup was necessary to prevent the Soviets from staging a coup of their own cannot be conclusively answered. No one will ever know how the Soviets might have acted or how successful they would have been. The coup certainly had disastrous aftereffects. What might have been the effects of not carrying it out must remain forever in the realm of speculation.

How did Iran reach the tragic crossroads of August 1953? The main responsibility lies with the obtuse neocolonialism that guided the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and with the British government's willingness to accept it. If the company had shown even a modicum of good sense, it could have reached a compromise with the Iranian authorities. If it had cooperated with Prime Minister Razmara, who wanted the British to remain in Iran, Mossadegh might never even have come to power. But the men who ran the company, and the government officials who coddled them, were frozen in their imperial mindset and contemptuous of Iranians and their aspirations. Dean Acheson had it exactly right when he wrote: "Never had so few lost so much so stupidly and so fast."

Acheson also, however, laid blame on Mossadegh himself, whom he described as "inspired by a fanatical hatred of the British and a desire to expel them and all their works from the country regardless of the cost." Certainly, Mossadegh was almost as resistant to compromise as were the British. At several points he might have declared victory and made a deal. In the summer of 1952, for example, he was an unassailable national hero. He had been returned to power by a spontaneous mass uprising and had won a great victory over the British at the World Court. President Truman was on his side. A more pragmatic leader might have seized on this moment, but Mossadegh was not a pragmatist. He was a visionary, a utopian, a millenarian. The single-mindedness with which he pursued his

campaign against Anglo-Iranian made it impossible for him to compromise when he could and should have.

Another great failure in Mossadegh's judgment was his inability or refusal to understand how the world looked to Western leaders. They were in a state of near-panic about the spread of communist power. Mossadegh believed that his conflict with Anglo-Iranian had nothing to do with the global confrontation between East and West. This was highly unrealistic. The men who made decisions in Washington and Moscow viewed everything that happened in the world as part of the war they were waging for control of the world's destiny. It was foolish of Mossadegh to believe that he could separate Iran's grievance, justified though it was, from this all-encompassing conflict.

Mossadegh was also naïve in his assessment of the communists who controlled Tudeh and were working assiduously to penetrate Iran's government, army, and civil society. He detested autocracy and believed that all Iranians should be allowed to say and do what they wished. The fact that communists had taken advantage of democratic systems in Eastern Europe to seize power and destroy democracy seemed not to affect him. His refusal to crack down on communist movements in Iran put him on Washington's death list. This may have been unjust, but it was the harsh reality of the age. By failing to recognize it, Mossadegh strengthened his enemies.

Never during his twenty-six months in power did Mossadegh attempt to forge the National Front into a cohesive political movement. It remained a loose coalition without central leadership or an organized political base. In the Majlis election of 1952 Mossadegh made no effort to assemble a slate of candidates committed to its program. This made it highly vulnerable to outsiders who sought to break it apart, and prevented it from developing a following that might have been mobilized to defend the government at crucial moments.

Despite his historic misjudgments, however, Mossadegh can hardly be considered to have been a failure as prime minister. His achievements were profound and even earth-shattering. He set his people off on what would be a long and difficult voyage toward democracy and self-sufficiency, forever altering not only their history but the way they viewed themselves and the world around

them. He dealt a devastating blow to the imperial system and hastened its final collapse. He inspired people around the world who believe that nations can and must struggle for the right to govern themselves in freedom. He towers over Iranian history, Middle Eastern history, and the history of anticolonialism. No account of the twentieth century is complete without a chapter about him.

Mossadegh and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company brought disaster on themselves by refusing repeated efforts at compromise. Their final crack-up, however, would not have happened if British and American voters had not cooperated. They did so quite unwittingly. Iran was a visible but not overwhelming issue in the political campaign that brought the aging Winston Churchill back to power in London. It was hardly an issue at all in Dwight Eisenhower's campaign, although fear of a worldwide communist advance certainly shaped the perceptions of many voters. The outcome of both elections was determined as much by a simple desire for change as by anything else. In faraway Iran these outcomes shaped the course of all future history. If Churchill and Eisenhower had not won, there would have been no Operation Ajax.

The election in the United States was especially significant because it brought John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles to power. They were driven men, intensely focused on the worldwide communist threat. Their decision to make Iran the first battleground of their crusade may or may not have been wise, but they deserve to be judged harshly for the way they made it. Even before taking their oaths of office, both brothers had convinced themselves beyond all doubt that Mossadegh must go. They never even considered the possibility that a coup might be a bad idea or that it might have negative consequences. History might view their action more favorably if it had been the result of serious, open-minded reflection and debate. Instead, it sprang from petulant impatience, from a burning desire to do something, anything, that would seem like a victory over communism. Ideology, not reason, drove the Dulles brothers. Iran was the place they chose to start showing the world that the United States was no longer part of what Vice President Richard Nixon called "Dean Acheson's college of cowardly Communist containment."

There was no substantial difference in the way Truman and Eisenhower assessed the communist threat. Both believed that

Moscow was directing a relentless campaign of subversion aimed at world domination, that Iran was one of this campaign's likeliest targets, and that the United States had no higher national priority than to resist and defeat it. They differed profoundly, however, in their views of how to shape America's resistance. Truman accepted and even welcomed the rise of nationalism in the developing world. He believed that by placing itself alongside nationalist movements, the United States could show the world that it was the truest friend of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The idea of overthrowing foreign governments was abhorrent to him, in part because he recognized that the long-term consequences were entirely unpredictable and might well be catastrophic.

Truman spent many hours thinking and talking about Iran, but Eisenhower was far less engaged. He allowed the Dulles brothers to shape his administration's policy toward the restive Third World. They were anxious for quick and visible successes in their anticommunist crusade and saw covert action as a way to achieve them. Preemptive coups, actions against threats that had not yet materialized, seemed to them not only wise but imperative. They did not worry about the future consequences of such coups because they believed that if the United States did not sponsor them, its own future would be endangered.

The success of Operation Ajax had an immediate and far-reaching effect in Washington. Overnight, the CIA became a central part of the American foreign policy apparatus, and covert action came to be regarded as a cheap and effective way to shape the course of world events. Kermit Roosevelt could sense this view taking hold even before he had finished delivering his White House briefing on September 4, 1953.

"One of my audience seemed almost alarmingly enthusiastic," he wrote afterward. "John Foster Dulles was leaning back in his chair. Despite his posture, he was anything but sleepy. His eyes were gleaming; he seemed to be purring like a giant cat. Clearly he was not only enjoying what he was hearing, but my instincts told me that he was planning as well."

Dulles was indeed planning. The next year he and his brother organized the CIA's second coup d'etat, which led to the fall of President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala and set off a sequence of events in that country that led to civil war and hundreds of thousands of

violent deaths. Later the CIA set out to kill or depose foreign leaders from Cuba and Chile to the Congo and Vietnam. Each of these operations had profound effects that reverberate to this day. Some produced immense misery and suffering and turned whole regions of the world bitterly against the United States.

The final question to be answered is why Operation Ajax succeeded. The answer has a great deal to do with luck and happenstance. Had key participants made different decisions at any one of a half-dozen different points, the coup would have failed.

Kermit Roosevelt might have decided to give up and go home after the failed attempt of August 15. More plausibly, Mossadegh and his advisers might have dealt more sternly with the plotters. "Mossadegh should have reacted immediately and had them all shot," Shapour Bakhtiar said in an interview years later. That would almost certainly have saved the day, but it was not Mossadegh's nature.

The coup might also have failed if Mossadegh had been quicker to order his police to crack down on the hostile crowds that Roosevelt and his agents sent into the streets; if, when Mossadegh finally did order a crackdown, he had chosen a loyal officer rather than the outspokenly conservative General Daftary to carry it out; if Daftary had not intercepted and managed to turn back the loyalist column headed by General Kiani that was on its way to defend the government; if the loyal chief of staff, General Riahi, had managed to escape capture and mobilize more loyal units; if Mossadegh had called his supporters onto the streets instead of ordering them to stay home in the twenty-four hours before the final blow was struck; or if communists from the well-organized Tudeh party had decided to swing into action on Mossadegh's behalf.

Undoubtedly, there would have been no coup in August 1953 if it had not been for the CIA. The CIA devised Operation Ajax, paid a large sum to carry it out—estimates of the final cost range from $100,000 to $20 million, depending on which expenses are counted—and assigned one of its most imaginative agents to direct it. Yet Kermit Roosevelt and his comrades could not have succeeded without help from Iranians. Two groups provided invaluable help.

First were the Rashidian brothers and other covert agents who had spent years building the subversive network that Roosevelt found waiting for him when he arrived. Second were the military officers who provided decisive firepower on the climactic day.

Iran was falling toward chaos during Mossadegh's last weeks. British and American agents had worked relentlessly to split the National Front and the rest of Iranian society, and their efforts proved how vulnerable an undeveloped society can be to a sustained campaign of bribery and destabilization. Yet Mossadegh himself helped bring Iran to the dead end it reached in mid-1953. It may be an exaggeration to assert, as some have done, that at some level he actually wished to be overthrown. Nonetheless, he had run out of options. Many Iranians sensed this and were ready for a new beginning.

Foreign intelligence agents set the stage for the coup and unleashed the forces that carried it out. At a certain point, however, the operation took on a momentum of its own. The great mob that surged through the streets of Tehran on August 18 was partly mercenary and partly a genuine expression of people's loss of faith in Mossadegh. The CIA laid the groundwork for that day's events but even in its own postmortem admitted: "To what extent the resulting activity stemmed from the specific efforts of all our agents will never be known."

Iranians understood very soon after the coup that foreigners had played a central role in organizing it. In the United States, however, that realization was very slow in coming. Only when anti-American hatred exploded in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 did Americans even realize that their country was unloved there. Slowly, they were able to discover the reason why.

Just four months after Mossadegh's overthrow, Richard Nixon traveled to Iran and pronounced himself much impressed with both Prime Minister Zahedi and Mohammad Reza Shah. President Eisenhower was more circumspect. He did not visit Iran until 1959 and stayed for just six hours. The Shah gave him a festive welcome and presented him with a silver peacock inlaid with sapphires and rubies. In private, however, the two leaders had a disagreement that foreshadowed trouble to come. Eisenhower warned the Shah that military strength alone could not make any country secure, and urged him to pay attention to his people's "basic aspirations." The

James F. Goode: Mossadegh was no saint, as even his advisors recognized. He could be stubborn and narrow-minded. Yet he was the most popular leader in modern times, at least prior to the [Islamic] revolution. . . . If Mossadegh was a prisoner of the past—opposed to dictatorial rule, supportive of constitutional government, hating foreign influence—the Americans were no less prisoners of the Cold War mindset that would not tolerate neutralism in the struggle against godless Communism.

Mary Ann Heiss: In the long term it may well be true that the inability of the British and the United States to deal with Mossadegh, whose policies seem moderate in hindsight, cleared the path not so much for the Shah and his agents over the next several decades but for the far more radical, dangerous and anti-Western regimes that would follow after 1979. . . . U. S. involvement in the [1953] coup and the 1954 consortium agreement convinced the Iranian people that the United States cared little for their interests, that it was more concerned with propping up British imperialism than with assisting their national self-determination and independence. These convictions led Iranian nationalists to dub the United States the Great Satan and to blame it for all their nation's ills during the next twenty-five years. . . . By subverting Iranian nationalism, the oil dispute of the 1950s laid the seeds for the Islamic Revolution that would come twenty-five years later and that would usher in even more anti-Western regimes in Tehran than Mossadegh's. As a result, its consequences continue even now to cast a shadow over the Persian Gulf and beyond.

Nikki R. Keddie: The 1953 coup, which culminated a year later in an oil agreement leaving effective control of oil production and marketing and fifty percent of the profits in the hands of the world oil cartel companies, had an understandably traumatic effect on Iranian public opinion, which has continued down to the present. . . . Feelings against the United States government became far stronger when it became known that the United States was heavily involved in the 1953 overthrow of Mossadegh. American support over twenty-five years for the Shah's dictatorship and nearly all its ways added to this anti-American feeling. Hence, in both the British and American cases, however exaggerated and paranoid some charges by Iranians may be, suspiciousness and hostility have their roots in real and important occurrences;

chiefly, participation in the overthrow of popular revolutionary movements and support of unpopular governments. . . .

William Roger Louis: Nations, like individuals, cannot be manipulated without a sense on the part of the aggrieved that old scores must eventually be settled. . . . In the short term, the intervention of 1953 appeared to be effective. Over the longer term, the older advice not to interfere would seem to be the better part of political wisdom.

These views come close to a consensus. They eerily vindicate those who opposed the use of force against Mossadegh. President Truman predicted that mishandling the Iran crisis would produce "a disaster to the free world." Henry Grady, his ambassador in Tehran, warned that a coup would be "utter folly" and would push Iran into "a status of disintegration with all that implies." Anyone reading those words in the quarter-century after 1953 would have thought them wildly mistaken. Later history, however, redeems them and the men who spoke them. The results of Operation Ajax were just as dire as they predicted, although the backlash—or "blowback," as intelligence agents call it—took longer to materialize than anyone expected.

A fair case can be made that Iran was not ready for democracy in 1953. It might well have fallen into disarray if the United States had not intervened, although if American and British intelligence officers had not meddled so shamelessly in its domestic politics, it might also have returned to relative calm. It is difficult to imagine, however, an outcome that would have produced as much pain and horror over the next half-century as that produced by Operation Ajax. Only a Soviet takeover followed by war between the superpowers would have been worse.

The coup bought the United States and the West a reliable Iran for twenty-five years. That was an undoubted triumph. But in view of what came later, and of the culture of covert action that seized hold of the American body politic in the coup's wake, the triumph seems much tarnished. From the seething streets of Tehran and other Islamic capitals to the scenes of terror attacks around the world, Operation Ajax has left a haunting and terrible legacy.

Shah replied that security in the Middle East could be achieved "only by building Iran's military strength."

Eisenhower never admitted the American role in Operation Ajax. In his memoir, he recalled receiving a briefing about it but said it was written, rather than oral, and described Roosevelt as "an American in Iran, unidentified to me." He was a bit more candid in his diary. There he wrote: "The things we did were covert." He admitted, as he did not in his memoir, that Roosevelt had given him a personal briefing about the coup: "I listened to his detailed report," he wrote, "and it seemed more like a dime novel than historical facts."

Forty-seven years after the coup, the United States officially acknowledged its involvement. President Bill Clinton, who had embarked on what proved to be an unsuccessful effort to improve American relations with Iran, approved a carefully worded statement that could be read as an apology. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright delivered it during a speech in Washington:

"In 1953 the United States played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's popular prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh," she said. "The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons. But the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs."

A handful of American historians have devoted themselves to studying the 1953 coup and its effects. They agree, to different degrees and with different emphases, that the coup defined all of subsequent Iranian history and reshaped the world in ways that are only now becoming clear. Here are some of their observations:

James A. Bill: American policy in Iran during the early 1950s succeeded in ensuring that there would be no Communist takeover in the country at the time, and that Iranian oil reserves would be available to the Western world at advantageous terms for two decades afterwards. It also deeply alienated Iranian patriots of all social classes and weakened the moderate, liberal nationalists represented by organizations like the National Front. This paved the way for the incubation of extremism, both of the left and of the right. This extremism became unalterably anti-American. . . . The fall of Mossadegh marked the end of a century of friendship between the two countries, and began a new era of U. S. intervention and growing hostility against the United States among the weakened forces of Iranian nationalism.

Richard W. Cottam: The decision to overturn Mossadegh was a truly historic one. Iran was at the point of change at which the percentage of the population entering the political process, or disposed to do so, was increasing in geometric progression. These awakening individuals would look to leaders whom they recognized and trusted for the norms, values and institutions they could support. Had Mossadegh, the National Front and the religious leaders who interpreted the Koran more liberally remained in control of the Iranian government, they could have served as the socializing agents for this awakening mass. Instead, they were replaced by a royal dictatorship that stood aloof from the people. . . . U. S. policy did change Iran's history in fundamental ways. It helped oust a nationalist elite which had looked to the United States as its ideological ally and its one reliable external supporter. In helping eliminate a government that symbolized Iran's search for national integrity and dignity, it helped deny the successor regime nationalist legitimacy.

Mark J. Gasiorowski: In retrospect, the United States–sponsored coup d'état in Iran of August 19, 1953, has emerged as a critical event in postwar world history. . . . Had the coup not occurred, Iran's future would undoubtedly have been vastly different. Similarly, the U. S. role in the coup and in the subsequent consolidation of the Shah's dictatorship were decisive for the future of U. S. relations with Iran. U. S. complicity in these events figured prominently in the terrorist attacks on American citizens and installations that occurred in Iran in the early 1970s; in the anti-American character of the 1978–79 revolution; and in the many anti-American incidents that emanated from Iran after the revolution, including, most notably, the embassy hostage crisis. Latter-day supporters of the coup frequently argue that it purchased twenty-five years of stability in Iran under a pro-American regime. As the dire consequences of the revolution for U. S. interests continue to unfold, one can wonder whether this has been worth the long-term cost.