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CLANDESTINE SERVICE HISTORY

OVERTHROW OF PREMIER MOSSADEQ OF IRAN

November 1952-August 1953

Date written : March 1954
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Wilber

S E C R E T

HISTORIAN'S NOTE

This paper, entitled Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, was written in March 1954 by Dr. Donald N. Wilber who had played an active role in the operation. The study was written because it seemed desirable to have a record of a major operation prepared while documents were readily at hand and while the memories of the personnel involved in the activity were still fresh. In addition, it was felt advisable to stress certain conclusions reached after the operation had been completed and to embody some of these in the form of recommendations applicable to future, parallel operations.

Documents pertaining to the operation described in this paper are in the Project TPAJAX files which are held by the Iran Branch of the Near East and South Asia Division.

All proper names mentioned in this paper have been checked for accuracy and completeness. A serious effort has been made to supply the first name and middle initial of each individual. The omission of any first names and middle initials indicates that such information could not be located.

Dean L. Dodge
NE Division
Historical Officer
March 1969

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June 18, 2000

Editor's Note:

The C.I.A.'s history of the 1953 coup in Iran is made up of the following documents: a historian's note, a summary introduction, a lengthy narrative account written by Dr. Donald N. Wilber, and, as appendices, five planning documents he attached. On April 16, 2000, The New York Times on the Web published the introduction and several of the appendices.

The Times has now decided to publish the main body of the text after removing certain names and identifying descriptions. The editing was done after consultations with historians who believed there might be serious risk that the families of some of those named as foreign agents would face retribution in Iran.

The introductory summary and the main body of the document are inconsistent on a few dates and facts. In its reporting on the document, the Times has relied upon details presented in the main body of the text.

The table of contents provides navigation throughout the document. Each entry is linked to the relevant section of this file. The table of contents page appears at the end of each chapter and appendix.

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~~IRAFHT~~

CAMPAIGN TO INSTALL PRO-WESTERN GOVERNMENT IN IRAN

AUTHORITY:

Approved by [redacted]
[redacted] 11 July 1953

TARGET

Prime Minister Mossadeq and his government

OBJECTIVES

Through legal, or quasi-legal, methods to effect the fall of the Mossadeq government; and

To replace it with a pro-Western government under the Shah's leadership, with Zahedi as its Prime Minister

CIA ACTION

Plan of action was implemented in four phases:

1. [redacted]

to strengthen the Shah's will to exercise his constitutional power and to sign those decrees necessary to effect the legal removal of Mossadeq as Prime Minister;

2. Welded together and coordinated the efforts of those political fac-

~~tions in Iran who were antagonistic toward Mossadeq, including the power-~~

fully influential clergy, to gain their support and backing of any legal action taken by the Shah to accomplish Mossadeq's removal;

3. [redacted] disenchant

the Iranian population with the myth of Mossadeq's patriotism, by exposing his collaboration with the Communists and his manipulation of constitutional authority to serve his own personal ambitions for power;

[redacted]

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Simultaneously, conducted a "war of nerves" against Mossadeq designed to reveal to Mossadeq and to the general populace that increased economic aid would not be forthcoming and that the U. S. viewed with alarm Mossadeq's policies:

- a. A series of public statements by high U. S. officials implying that there was little hope that Mossadeq could expect increased U. S. aid;
- b. U. S. press and magazine articles which were critical of him and his methods; and
- c. [redacted] absence of the American Ambassador, lending credence to the impression that the U. S. had lost confidence in Mossadeq and his government.

[redacted]

RESULTS

The original D-Day set by CIA misfired when Mossadeq, learning of the plan through a leak [redacted] took immediate counteraction to neutralize the plan.

[redacted] was launched in the interim period between the original and final D-Days to educate the Iranian population to the fact that, in view of the dissolution of the Majlis (effected by Mossadeq at an earlier stage to prevent its voting

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him out of power) and the Shah's decree removing Mossadeq as Prime Minister, Mossadeq's continued exercise of the powers of that office was illegal and that authority to govern the people rested solely and completely in the hands of the Shah.

The Nationalists and the Communists during this period inadvertently assisted our cause through their premature attempts to promote a republican government. This theme was contrary to the public's opinion, whose sympathies were with the Shah. The Shah's dramatic flight out of the country served to further intensify his people's sense of loyalty to him.

These actions resulted in literal revolt of the population, [redacted]

and security forces joined the populace, Radio Tehran was taken over, military were forced to act in quelling the riots and gained strength on the and Mossadeq was forced to flee on 17 Aug 53 momentum of the situation in support of the Shah.

The

The ouster of Mossadeq was successfully accomplished on 19 Aug 1953.

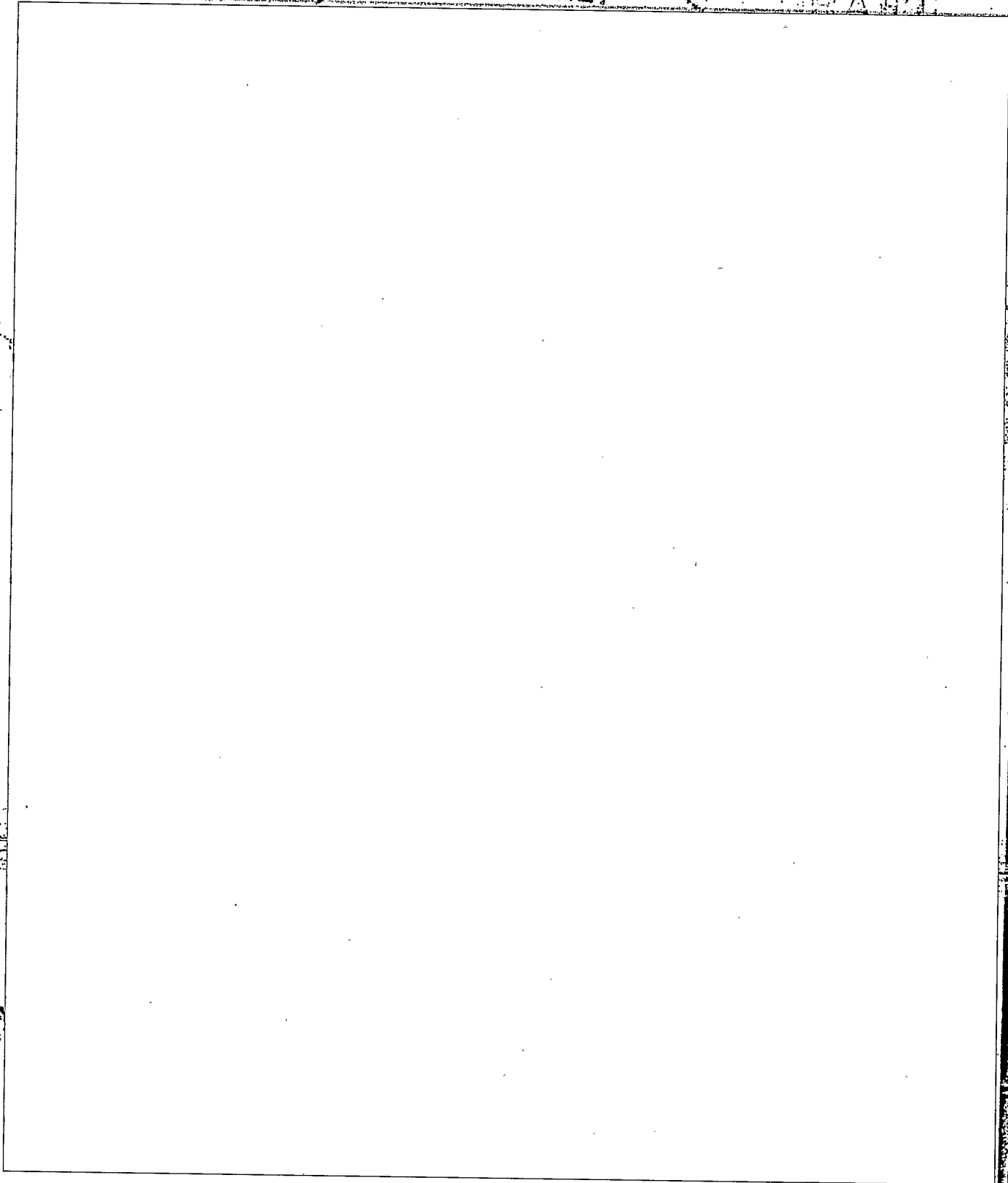
NOTE

2. That an adequate amount of U. S. interim economic aid would be forthcoming to the successor government.

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SUMMARY

By the end of 1952, it had become clear that the Mossadeq government in Iran was incapable of reaching an oil settlement with interested Western countries; was reaching a dangerous and advanced stage of illegal, deficit financing; was disregarding the Iranian constitution in prolonging Premier Mohammed Mossadeq's tenure of office; was motivated mainly by Mossadeq's desire for personal power; was governed by irresponsible policies based on emotion; had weakened the Shah and the Iranian Army to a dangerous degree; and had cooperated closely with the Tudeh (Communist) Party of Iran. In view of these factors, it was estimated that Iran was in real danger of falling behind the Iron Curtain; if that happened it would mean a victory for the Soviets in the Cold War and a major setback for the West in the Middle East. No remedial action other than the covert action plan set forth below could be found to improve the existing state of affairs.

It was the aim of the TPAJAX project to cause the fall of the Mossadeq government; to reestablish the prestige and power of the Shah; and to replace the Mossadeq government with one which would govern Iran according to

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constructive policies. Specifically, the aim was to bring to power a government which would reach an equitable oil settlement, enabling Iran to become economically sound and financially solvent, and which would vigorously prosecute the dangerously strong Communist Party.

Once it had been determined definitely that it was not in American interests for the Mossadeq government to remain in power and CIA had been so informed by the Secretary of State in March 1953, CIA began drafting a plan whereby the aims stated above could be realized through covert action. An estimate entitled "Factors Involved in the Overthrow of Mossadeq" was completed on 16 April 1953. It was here determined that an overthrow of Mossadeq was possible through covert operations. In April it was determined that CIA should conduct the envisioned operation jointly with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). By the end of April, it was decided that CIA and SIS officers would draw up a plan on Cyprus which would be submitted to CIA and SIS Headquarters, and to the Department of State and the Foreign Office for final approval. On 3 June 1953, US Ambassador Loy Wesley Henderson arrived in the United States where he was fully consulted with regard to the objective and aims, as stated above, as well as CIA's intentions to design covert means of achieving

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the objective and aims.

The plan was completed by 10 June 1953 at which time Mr. Kermit Roosevelt, Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, CIA (who carried with him the views of the Department of State, CIA, and Ambassador Henderson); Mr. Roger Goiran, CIA Chief of Station, Iran; and two CIA planning officers met in Beirut to consider the plan. With minor changes the operational proposal was submitted to the SIS in London on 14 June 1953.

On 19 June 1953, the final operational plan, agreed upon by Mr. Roosevelt for CIA and by British Intelligence in London, was submitted in Washington to the Department of State; to Mr. Allen W. Dulles, Director of CIA; and to Ambassador Henderson for approval. Simultaneously, it was submitted to the British Foreign Office by SIS for approval. The Department of State wanted to be assured of two things before it would grant approval of the plan:

1. that the United States Government could provide adequate grant aid to a successor Iranian Government so that such a government could be sustained until an oil settlement was reached;
2. that the British Government would signify in writing, to the satisfaction of the Department

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of State, its intention to reach an early oil settlement with a successor Iranian Government in a spirit of good will and equity.

The Department of State satisfied itself on both of these scores.

In mid-July 1953, the Department of State and the British Foreign Office granted authorization for the implementation of the TPAJAX project, and the Director of CIA obtained the approval of the President of the United States. The SIS, with the concurrence of the CIA Director and Ambassador Henderson, proposed that Mr. Roosevelt assume field command in Tehran of the final phases of the operation. It was determined by the Department of State that it would be advisable for Ambassador Henderson to postpone his return to Iran, from Washington consultation, until the operation had been concluded. Arrangements were made jointly with SIS whereby operational liaison would be conducted on Cyprus where a CIA officer would be temporarily stationed, and support liaison would be conducted in Washington. Rapid three-way communications were arranged through CIA facilities between Tehran, Cyprus, and Washington. The time set for the operation was mid-August.

In Iran, CIA and SIS propaganda assets were to conduct

an increasingly intensified propaganda effort through the press, handbills, and the Tehran clergy in a campaign designed to weaken the Mossadeq government in any way possible. In the United States, high-ranking US officials were to make official statements which would shatter any hopes held by Premier Mossadeq that American economic aid would be forthcoming, and disabuse the Iranian public of the Mossadeq myth that the United States supported his regime.

General Fazlollah Zahedi, former member of Mossadeq's cabinet, was chosen as the most suitable successor to the Premier since he stood out as the only person of stature who had consistently been openly in opposition to Mossadeq and who claimed any significant following. Zahedi was to be approached by CIA and be told of our operation and its aim of installing him as the new prime minister. He was to name a military secretariat with which CIA would conclude a detailed staff plan of action.

From the outset, the cooperation of the Shah was considered to be an essential part of the plan. His cooperation was necessary to assure the action required of the Tehran military garrisons, and to legalize the succession of a new prime minister. Since the Shah had shown himself to be a man of indecision, it was determined that pressure

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on him to cooperate would take the following forms:

1. The Shah's dynamic and forceful twin sister, Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, was to come from Europe to urge the Shah to dismiss Mossadeq. She would say she had been in contact with US and UK officials who had requested her to do so.

2. Arrangements were made for a visit to Iran by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, former head of the US Gendarme Mission, whom the Shah liked and respected. Schwarzkopf was to explain the proposed project and get from the Shah signed firmans (royal decrees) dismissing Mossadeq, appointing Zahedi, and calling on the Army to remain loyal to the Crown.

3. The principal indigenous British agent, whose bona fides had been established with the Shah, was to reinforce Schwarzkopf's message and assure the Shah that this was a joint US-UK action.

4. Failing results from the above, Mr. Roosevelt, representing the President of the United States, would urge the Shah to sign the above-mentioned firmans. When received, the firmans would be released by CIA to Zahedi on the day called for

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in the plan. On D-Day, the Shah was to be at some location outside of Tehran so that Zahedi, armed with the royal firmans and with military support, could take over the government without danger of the Shah's reversing his stand, and to avoid any attempt on the Shah's life.

Through agents in the Tehran military, CIA was to ensure, to the degree possible, Tehran Army cooperation in support of the Shah-appointed new prime minister.

The following public statements made in the United States had tremendous impact on Iran and Mossadeq, and contributed greatly to Mossadeq's downfall:

1. The publication, on 9 July 1953, of President Eisenhower's 29 June 1953 letter to Premier Mossadeq made it clear that increased aid would not be forthcoming to Iran.
2. The Secretary of State's press conference of 28 July 1953 stated that ".... The growing activities of the illegal Communist Party in Iran and the toleration of them by the Iranian Government has caused our government concern. These developments make it more difficult to grant aid to Iran."
3. The President's Seattle speech at the Governors' convention, in which he stated that the United States

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would not sit by and see Asian countries fall behind the Iron Curtain, had definite effect.

In cooperation with the Department of State, CIA had several articles planted in major American newspapers and magazines which, when reproduced in Iran, had the desired psychological effect in Iran and contributed to the war of nerves against Mossadeq.

After considerable pressure from Princess Ashraf and General Schwarzkopf, and after several meetings with Mr. Roosevelt, the Shah finally signed the required firmans on 15 August 1953. Action was set for 16 August. However, owing to a security leak in the Iranian military, the chief of the Shah's bodyguard, assigned to seize Mossadeq with the help of two truckloads of pro-Shah soldiers, was overwhelmed by superior armed forces still loyal to Mossadeq. The balance of the military plan was thus frustrated for that day. Upon hearing that the plan had misfired, the Shah flew to Baghdad. This was an act of prudence and had been at least partially foreseen in the plan. Zahedi remained in hiding in CIA custody. With his key officers, he eluded Mossadeq's security forces which were seeking to apprehend the major opposition elements.

Early in the afternoon of 17 August 1953, Ambassador

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Henderson returned to Tehran. General Zahedi, through a CIA-arranged secret press conference and through CIA covert printing facilities, announced to Iran that he was legally prime minister and that Mossadeq had staged an illegal coup against him. CIA agent assets disseminated a large quantity of photographs of the firmans, appointing Zahedi prime minister and dismissing Mossadeq. This had tremendous impact on the people of Tehran who had already been shocked and angered when they realized that the Shah had been forced to leave Iran because of Mossadeq's actions. US Ambassador Burton Y. Berry, in Baghdad, contacted the Shah and stated that he had confidence that the Shah would return soon to Iran despite the apparent adverse situation at that time. Contact was also established with the Shah in Rome after he had flown there from Baghdad. Mr. Roosevelt and the station consistently reported that Mossadeq's apparent victory was misleading; that there were very concrete signs that the Army was still loyal to the Shah; and that a favorable reversal of the situation was possible. The station further urged both the British Foreign Office and the Department of State to make a maximum effort to persuade the Shah to make public statements encouraging the Army and populace to reject Mossadeq and to accept Zahedi as prime minister.

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On 19 August 1953, a pro-Shah demonstration, originating in the bazaar area, took on overwhelming proportions. The demonstration appeared to start partially spontaneously, revealing the fundamental prestige of the Shah and the public alarm at the undisguised republican move being started by the Communists as well as by certain National Frontists. Station political action assets also contributed to the beginnings of the pro-Shah demonstrations. The Army very soon joined the pro-Shah movement and by noon of that day it was clear that Tehran, as well as certain provincial areas, were controlled by pro-Shah street groups and Army units. The situation was such that the above-mentioned military plan could then be implemented. At the station's signal, Zahedi came out of hiding to lead the movement. He first broadcast over Radio Tehran and announced that the government was his. The General Staff offices were then seized, Mossadeq's home was gutted, and pro-Mossadeq politicians and officers arrested. By the end of 19 August, the country was in the hands of the new Premier, Zahedi, and members of the Mossadeq government were either in hiding or were incarcerated.

The Shah returned shortly to Iran where he was given a rousing popular reception. The Shah was deeply moved by the fact that his people and Army had revolted in the

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face of adversity against a vindictive Mossadeq and a Communist Party riding the crest of temporary victory and clearly planning to declare Iran a republic. The Shah felt for the first time that he had the mandate of his people, and he returned determined to regain firm control of the Army.

In order to give Zahedi badly needed immediate financial assistance so that month-end payrolls could be met before the United States could provide large scale grant aid, CIA covertly made available \$5,000,000 within two days of Zahedi's assumption of power.

[The C.I.A.'s secret history of the 1953 coup in Iran was a nearly 200-page document, comprising the author's own account of the operation and a set of planning documents he attached. The New York Times on the Web is publishing the introduction and many of the planning documents. But the Times decided not to publish the main body of the text after consulting prominent historians who believed there might be serious risk that some of those named as foreign agents would face retribution in Iran.

Because the introductory summary and the main body of the document are inconsistent on a few dates and facts, readers may note discrepancies between accounts. In its reporting, the Times has relied upon details in the C.I.A. document not published here. In addition, certain names and identifying descriptions have been removed from the documents available on the Web.]

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