

HOW THE 'GREAT SATAN' GOT ITS NAME

In 1951, the democratically elected Iranian parliament, under the leadership of the nationalist movement of Dr. Mohammed Mosaddeq, voted unanimously to nationalize the immensely profitable Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was a pillar of Britain's economy and political clout. A month after that vote, Mossadeq was elected prime minister of Iran.

In response to nationalization, Britain placed an embargo on Iranian oil exports, which worsened the already fragile economy. U.S. President Harry S. Truman ruled out joining Britain in a coup against Mossadeq, and Britain felt unable to act without American cooperation, particularly since Mossadeq had shut down their embassy in 1952.

Truman's successor, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, was persuaded by anti-communist arguments that there was potential for Iran's Communist Tudeh Party to capitalize on political instability and assume power, aligning Iran and its immense oil resources with the Soviet bloc. Coup plans which had stalled under Truman were revived by an eager intelligence corps, with powerful aid from the brothers John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State) and Allen Welsh Dulles (Director of Central Intelligence), after Eisenhower's inauguration in 1953.

On June 19, 1953, Kermit Roosevelt Jr. slipped across the border under his CIA cover as "James Lockridge." He was put up in the capital, Tehran, in a place rented by British intelligence. As Mr. Lockridge, he became a regular at the Turkish Embassy where he played tennis. No one suspected that "Mr. Lockridge"

was the grandson of Teddy Roosevelt, the 26th US President.

Under the direction of Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA and British intelligence funded and led a coup d'état to overthrow Prime Minister with the help of military forces loyal to the Shah through Operation Ajax. The plot hinged on orders signed by the Shah to dismiss Mossadeq as prime minister and replace him with General Fazlollah Zahedi, a choice agreed on by the British and Americans.

The coup attempt was swiftly thwarted. Mossadeq made dozens of arrests. Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi, a top conspirator, went into hiding, and the shah fled the country. The CIA, believing the coup to have failed, called it off. "Operation Ajax has been tried and failed and we should not participate in any operation against Mossadeq which could be traced back to US," CIA headquarters wrote to its station chief in Iran in the newly declassified cable sent on Aug. 18, 1953. "Operations against Mossadeq should be discontinued."

That is the cable which Kermit Roosevelt, top CIA officer in Iran ignored. At least "one guy was in the room with Kermit Roosevelt when he got this cable." This was Malcolm Byrne, who directs the U.S.-Iran Relations Project at the National Security Archive at George Washington University. Byrne told Foreign Policy. "[Roosevelt] said no — we're not done here." The cable itself and its contents were a portion of the approximately 1,000 pages of documents released a year ago in mid-June.

The consequences of Roosevelt's decision were momentous. The next day, on August 19, 1953, with the aid of "rented" crowds widely



believed to have been arranged with CIA assistance, the coup succeeded. Iran's nationalist hero was jailed, the monarchy restored under the Western-friendly shah, and Anglo-Iranian oil — renamed British Petroleum — tried to get its fields back. (But didn't really: Despite the coup, nationalist pushback against a return to foreign control of oil was too much, leaving BP and other majors to share Iran's oil wealth with Tehran.)

In his book *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, reporter Stephen Kinzer reported that the Shah said to Roosevelt, "I owe my throne to God, my people, my army - and to you". The deposed Mossadeq was given a show trial, and placed in solitary confinement for three years in military prison, followed by house arrest for life. Zahedi returned to succeed prime minister Mossadeq. Massive protests broke out across the nation, leaving almost 300 dead in firefights in the streets of Tehran.

The ramifications of overthrowing an immensely popular, independent-minded and democratically-elected Mossadeq government was the reason the CIA originally tried to call it off. Kermit's newly restored Shah continued to be "too Westernized", to the cost of religious and cultural values. It was the role that religion plays in Iran that the US failed to understand.

According to Madeleine Albright; "we were caught off balance by the revolution in Iran for the simple reason that we had never seen anything like it. As a political force, Islam was thought to be waning, not rising A revolution in Iran based on a religious backlash against America and the West? Other than a few fanatics, who would support such a thing? Our experts failed to grasp either the depth of hostility toward the Shah or the loyal following that the Muslim clerics could muster, even amid the rampant materialism of the late twentieth century. Unwisely, the Pahlavis alienated the religious leadership, which had historically partnered with the temporal leadership in administering the country. For most Shi'a, no government except that of the Mahdi has complete legitimacy. Once the religious leaders withdrew support for the Shah, his government enjoyed no legitimacy at all."

-From the Forgotten History Greenfuse Archive




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