Mohammad Mossadegh on the cover of *Time* Magazine, January, 1952
Truman, Eisenhour, and America’s Reactions to the Nationalization of Iranian Oil

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In the middle of 1952 President Harry S. Truman declined Winston Churchill’s petitions for American aid in plans to oust Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh from office. Truman believed that diplomacy was the best viable option to settle the Iranian oil nationalization crisis, to which Britain was reacting. A coup would have been disastrous to Iran and dangerous for the geopolitical Cold War climate. In August of 1953, however, Prime Minister Mossadegh was deposed publically, tried, and sentenced to house arrest, a sentence that he would serve for the rest of his life. This dramatic political upset came as the direct objective and outcome of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)’s Operation Ajax, a covert masterwork directly approved by President Dwight Eisenhower. In it, the CIA orchestrated the Iranian royalists, the Iranian military, and the British SIS in a seemingly spontaneous street riot in order to sway the Iranian public back into the hand of the Shah. Oddly enough, what started as an economic dispute between British oil interests and Iranian nationalists was ended in an American-engineered coup d’état that has been heralded since as one of the single most crucial events in Western-Middle Eastern political and economic relations. The agent of change was not, however, the differences in personality or even ideology between Truman and
Eisenhower. The U. S. presidential election of 1952 came with a change in international circumstances and in political ideology that were influenced largely by the personalities of Truman and Eisenhower and on the part of Churchill but were not entirely contingent upon the presidential transition. These three persons must be considered along with the personalities of both Mohammad Reza Shah and Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh within the context of Iran’s political, economic, and social footing after the Second World War. Historians have offered a handful of explanations for this hasty and dramatic change of position of the United States toward Iran in such a minute timeframe. In retrospect, it has been the trap of American historians to perceive the actions of the Eisenhower administration toward Iran as a brash flexing of the secret intelligence muscle, sending a no-nonsense message to the Soviets and the post-colonial Middle East. It may also be enticing to reduce the events of 1953 down to wreckage accrued to preserve American oil interests. Upon closer examination, the complexities of the actions taken by all parties involved reveal heavy connotations all throughout, suggesting that the position the United States initially established as arbiter between two economic constituents could not be preserved in the face of Cold War and post-colonial tensions. In exploiting Truman and Eisenhower’s Cold War priorities, Iran and Britain pushed each other into a high-stakes conflict. In the end, America was forced into a position of high-stakes intervention by the pressure and actions of Iran and Britain.

Several factors fed into the dramatization of Iran’s push for nationalization. The tension between Iran and Britain over Iran’s oil industry had been playing out for half a century by the time Mohammad Mossadegh was appointed by the Shah. British oil interest in Iran began around the turn of the centuries and by the First World War, the
British had invested 2.2 million pounds into the privately owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company. What started as a 51 percent – 49 percent split of the profits devolved rapidly and by the 1930s Iran was only receiving 16 percent of its oil revenue. This figure would continue to decline further until the nationalization conflict came to a head, at which point the Iranian government was only receiving 10 to 12 percent of the profits from AIOC. Britain enjoyed a grossly controlling and surreptitious contractual ownership of the company, which was changed to become the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). “(AIOC) paid only 16 percent of its profits to Iran, had complete control over export prices, kept its records secret (including the below-market prices the British navy paid for its oil), and did little to replace expatriate technicians with Iranians.” Politically, Iran was beginning to reel with growing nationalist gusto from AIOC backlash. In 1941, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was installed as Shah or king of Iran by Britain after the abdication of the throne by his father, Reza Shah. Reza Shah had failed to satisfy Iran’s wishes toward favorable concessions with Britain over AIOC. Increasingly, the issue of nationalizing oil became enshrouded with a larger push to validate Iran’s post-imperial national sovereignty against Western powers, especially Britain. The Nationalist Front was established in October of 1949 by laborers at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to remedy the unjust working conditions indicative of early-stage industrialization. The National Frontists found as their champion Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, a charismatic


3 Ibid., 94.
advocate of oil nationalization. At the same time, the Iranian Communist Tudeh Party, though illegal, had gained some significant anti-Shah public sway as the residual aftertaste of the eviction of the Soviet Union from Iran after the Second World War. Geographically, the USSR was at Iran’s backdoor, and seemingly lying in wait, as relations with the West turned sour. This was perhaps the most key of the variables surrounding American involvement the Iranian oil dispute. A Soviet presence via the Tudeh party provided amplified Iranian anti-imperialist sentiment, which would strongly characterize Iranian reception of actions taken by both Britain and the U.S.

While some concessions were made, they only served the former oil company. Even after a somewhat improved settlement was reached, the Iranian government still only received marginal revenue. In July of 1949, the Majlis shot down improved concessions, deeming them “too little, too late.” The Majlis had begun supporting a nationalized oil industry, as had the Iranian masses. Intensifying Iranian dissatisfaction with AIOC’s contract with Britain was the plethora of agreements being made by neighboring countries with the U.S. at a fifty-fifty split of profits. Especially successful was the U.S.’s fifty-fifty agreement with the Saudis. The prime minister at the time, General Ali Razmara, had been a staunch royalist. When Prime Minister General Ali Razmara failed to succeed in negotiation a privatization of AIOC with a 50 percent profit share with British officials, the nationalist masses railed against him as a national traitor.

As Ali M. Ansari explains in his study of modern Iranian history, by this point

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nationalization had become not only a struggle of national sovereignty but had also
become the subject of a fatwa. Religious leaders had started proclaiming Iranian national
sovereignty a spiritual matter and championing Mossadegh. Muslim extremists
subsequently assassinated Razmara; the Shah, who was in constant fear of losing his hold
on the masses and attempts on his own life, appointed the National Frontists’ Dr.
Mohammad Mossadegh to the premiership.\(^5\)

Contrary to Mossadegh and the growing tide of nationalism in the Iranian
masses, the Shah was extremely concerned and hesitant for the prospects of a
nationalized oil industry. He was doubtful that Iran was prepared to independently
shoulder such a large-scale venture. But because of the increased characterization of the
entire crisis in terms of national sovereignty, the Shah had come to symbolize the
patronizing relationship between Iran and the Western imperial powers; his hesitation
was viewed as subjection to them and as reminiscent of his father’s failings. The Shah’s
qualms were not unfounded, however, and both the U.S. and Britain were immensely
aware of Iran’s economic shortcomings. But in March of 1951, the Majlis, under the
leadership of Prime Minister Mossadegh, announced the official nationalization of
Iranian oil. Britain refused to acknowledge this act, and immediately the conflict became
a “test of Iranian sovereignty” in the eyes of Mossadegh.\(^6\)

As Britain tinkered with the idea of setting economic sanctions on Iran, the
British Foreign Office in Tehran concluded that the repercussions would be grave,

\(^5\) Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1920: The Pahlavis and After* (London: Longman,
2003), 11.

\(^6\) Zahrani, 94.
indeed, for the Iranian economy, impacting 75 percent of its exchange earnings and causing widespread unemployment. Britain brought matters to the International Court of Justice at The Hague in July. The Court decided that Iran should keep AIOC operational while deliberations took place, but because the dispute was between Iran and a private company in which the British government owned shares and not the British government itself, the International Court was not in a position to adjudicate, much to the Nationalists’ pleasure. Mossadegh would hold to the end that the conflict was between the Iranian government and the AIOC, not the British government. All the while Iran promised compensation, but it was neither prepared nor determined to pay any reparations to Britain for the loss of its AIOC assets.

At this point, London proceeded to look to its Atlantic ally for support of a forceful nature. The British were adamant that the U.S. support and aid a British movement to remove Dr. Mossadegh from office. From the very onset of the crisis, however, Prime Minister Clement Atlee, followed by Winston Churchill, and President Harry Truman saw two dissimilar situations where Iran was concerned, each involving separate consequences. While Britain was exclusively involved in retaining their oil revenue from Iran to prop up their floundering post-World War II economy, the U.S. had little to gain economically or politically from Iran’s direct success or failure to nationalize. Truman’s position and subsequent actions were multifaceted, then, and rooted in Cold War geopolitics. To demystify any theory that American involvement in

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8 Stephen Kinzer, All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 98.
Iran at this point in time hinged on the prospect of American oil interests in the Middle East, it must be noted that the U.S. already had stable oil assets on the Persian Gulf in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait which had more than compensated for the loss of Iranian oil due to the closing of AIOC. Through the Iranian Nationalist movement America was only concerned in as much as there existed growing potential for the Soviets to take over in the politically and economically chaotic Iranian situation.

The response of the Truman administration to Iran’s push for nationalized oil was initially passive support. To a degree, Truman and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, expressed sympathy for the Iranian Nationalist movement. Stephen Kinzer explains “Truman… 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.” At the same time, the gravity of the situation threatened the long-standing alliance between the U.S. and Britain which was absolutely invaluable in the throes of the Cold War. Eventually, Truman’s approach was intensely fixed on establishing a negotiation that would protect Iran from complete economic break down and keep the door closed to the possibility of a Soviet coup. The Shah, the U.S., and Britain were all increasingly aware of the devastation a nationalization of AIOC could have on Iran economically and socially. The use of force was not desired unless given clear indication of a Soviet or otherwise Communist threat in Iran. In the event that a British embargo succeeded in crippling Iran’s economy, the Tudeh Party would almost certainly take to

9 Zahrani, 96.
10 Kinzer, 3.
the streets, ushering in the Soviets who would invariably assume control of the oil industry as their own, as well as Iran’s other economic assets.

Thus, after the ruling of the International Court of Justice, Truman hastened even more intently to mediate between the two countries. His diligence and passion in this effort was manifested in several distinct actions initiated by Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson. The first came in the form of Truman’s designation of W. Averell Harriman to act as liaison to Iran. Harriman had extensive experience as U.S. ambassador to Britain and to the Soviet Union and as director of the Marshall Plan. In his letter introducing Harriman and his mission to Mossadegh, Truman laid open his wishes in the matter. “I have watched with concern the breakdown of your discussions and the drift toward a collapse of oil operations with the attendant losses to Iran and the world. Surely this is a disaster which statesmanship can find a way to avoid….”1 Before Harriman’s mission was off the ground, however, the U.S. was exposed to full pressure on all sides. When Acheson, Assistant State Secretary McGhee, various other American officials and British ambassador to Iran Sir Oliver Franks met with Harriman to discuss the mission, Acheson received word from British Foreign Secretary Herbert Morris that the British expected no less than the presentation of a unified Atlantic alliance to the Iranians. Mossadegh, on the other hand, sent spiteful word back via U.S. ambassador Henry Grady that he had no recognition of the International Court’s power over the matter. He then

11 Ibid., 99.
delivered an “increasingly angry denunciation of the United States, which he said… was wilting in the face of British pressure.”

While the news of this encounter deeply distressed Acheson, he was persistent that American mediation be considered. Grady eventually convinced Mossadegh to reconsider and on July 15, 1951 Averell Harriman landed in Tehran. Harriman’s time in Iran was spent attempting to convince Dr. Mossadegh that a refusal to cooperate with Britain would leave Iran in devastation, but to no avail. Harriman even attempted to maneuver through the radical Ayatollah Kashani, who had supported nationalization so far. But Kashani was so indignant against the British, perhaps more so than even Mossadegh, that to him the thought of cooperation was laughable. During this time Harriman also toured the refinery at Abadan, the largest in the world. He was horrified at the workers’ housing conditions. As negotiations continued to go nowhere, the British “completely nineteenth-century colonial attitude toward Iran” and their unwillingness to deal fairly and coolly with Iran further discouraged Harriman. Finally, on August 22, Britain struck hard, imposing sanctions on Iran, prohibiting exports to Iran, withdrawing the majority of British personnel from the Iranian oil industry, and prohibiting Iran’s access to its hard currency accounts in British banks.

Before leaving, Harriman met with Mohammad Reza Shah and, defeated and disenchanted by the failed attempts at negotiation, insinuated that more direct action was coming. In what Stephen Kinzer qualifies as an unwitting foreshadow of America’s

12 Ibid., 100.
13 Ibid., 109.
14 Ibid., 110.
impending overthrow of Mossadegh, Harriman explained to the Shah that Mossadegh would likely need to be removed. Initially, it was to be the Shah’s right and responsibility to do so. All the while, Mossadegh pushed farther and farther against the power of the Shah, fuelled on by his wildly popular support. In a step of defiance, Mossadegh resigned when the Shah rejected his appointment of a Minister of War. To this point and continually so, the Shah had retained a special relationship with the military and a pro-Mossadegh Minister of War could prove catastrophic, removing one of the few remaining royalist bulwarks in Iran. Mossadegh was replaced by the appointment of Ahmad al-Saltana Qavam but Mossadegh was reinstated after demonstrations broke out. His return bolstered his public sway and verified his legitimacy as the people’s voice to the nations.

Britain’s response to Truman under Clement Atlee was initially frustration; there was never intention of settling with Mossadegh over AIOC. The presence of the U.S. as a mediator and not an ally would undermine all that Britain was hoping to attain. In July of 1951, British foreign minister, Herbert Morris, advised Sir Francis Shepherd against meeting with Harriman for fear that “the Persian government might be led to believe that he was acquiring more favorable terms for Persia.” 15 When London met with Washington, Secretary of State Dean Acheson was persistent that Britain take a more moderate approach. The situation between Churchill and Truman was strained further, however, when an independent American oil company was suspected to be cooperating with Mossadegh’s nationalized industry. At this development, an outraged Churchill believed a new strategy of persuasion was necessary to secure a unified front with the

15 McMurdo, 18.
U.S. The rhetoric from Churchill to the other side of the Atlantic was notably more concerned with growing Soviet sympathies in Mossadegh specifically and in Iran as a whole. In a letter to his predecessor in the office of Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, Churchill wrote:

> We have urged that the strongest representation should be made to the United States to take positive action in supporting the common interests of the Atlantic Powers, which would be deeply endangered by the Sovietization of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and we are glad to know that there is no question of our asking mediation.  

In October of 1951, Churchill reassumed office and with him, Anthony Eden replaced Herbert Morris as British Foreign Minister. Thus, Britain was now under a Conservative administration. Dean Acheson worried what this would mean for Iran because the Conservatives, like the Labour Party before them, had been “poisoned” by the advisement of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company against Mossadegh and were righteously adamant that Mossadegh should be destroyed and punished. Churchill learned eventually with Truman, that in order to ensure U.S. backing of any invasive action in Iran, the terms would absolutely have to be reflective of Cold War politics, not economic assets. Not coincidentally, the political and economic unrest caused by the failings of Iran and Britain in reaching a mutually beneficial agreement had caused heightened anti-Western sentiments in Mossadegh’s rhetoric and in the national public as well. This of course was acting as fuel to the Tudeh flame. Churchill also started to play to Truman’s Cold War power position, reminding him of his personal friendship with

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16 Personal Letter from Winston Churchill to Prime Minister Clement Atlee 9 July 1951. Referenced in McMurdo, 22.

Truman’s predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Second World War and leveraging America’s dependence on Britain in the ongoing Korean War.¹⁸

During the same month, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh journeyed to Washington. He had learned, as Churchill had, how powerful the rhetoric of a leftist threat could be when dealing with Truman. As Ansari explains, “It is testament to the strength of the Cold War myth of the communist bogey that both sides, including Mossadegh, exploited this Cold War narrative to justify international support, especially American.”¹⁹ And indeed, it would become even more so the lynchpin for American involvement. Mossadegh pleaded with Truman for a loan, which he argued would be necessary to abating the Communist influence in Iran. Truman knew full well that supporting the Iranian Oil Industry would mean playing his hand against Britain, which was increasingly implausible. Acheson and Truman were not impressed by his show. In his dealings with the President, Mossadegh went from a petulant defiance against any concessions to Britain to adulation, fishing for an American loan. In a meeting with the President and Secretary of State, Dr. Mossadegh implored, “Mr. President I am speaking for a very poor country, a country all desert – just sand, a few camels, a few sheep…” to which Acheson returned “Yes, and with your oil, just like Texas!” In his dealings with the Truman and Acheson Dr. Mossadegh only verified American fears that the time for diplomacy had passed and there was no hope for an agreement favorable to the U.S., Britain, and Iran. The time spent meeting with Dr. Mossadegh equated to seventy hours

¹⁸ Pirouz, 489.
¹⁹ Ansari, 120.
but was to no avail. When he returned to Iran empty handed, Mossadegh had in a way accomplished a large step in which he found great satisfaction. Truman’s rebuffing of Mossadegh’s request for a loan, however, was seen and expressed by Mossadegh as an official backing of Britain, and unsurprisingly, animosity strengthened in Iran against the U.S.

As Truman’s term came to a close, he gave a last push toward diplomacy. Throughout the second half of 1952, Truman and Churchill worked out a resolution for the Iran-British oil nationalization crisis, as a personal plea to Mossadegh for some semblance of an agreement to keep situations from spiraling further into the black for Iran. Churchill personally took advantage of the failing American mediation to bring Truman more into Britain’s plans. Britain’s main concerns at this point surrounded the reparations Iran owed the British government from the cancelation of the AIOC contract. On August 27 the first Churchill-Truman proposal was sent to Iran. Predictably, Mossadegh and the Majlis indignantly rejected this proposal on the grounds that it assumed British superiority and entitlement beyond what Iran was willing to accept. Mossadegh struck back; he sent word that if Britain continued to press for these concessions, Iran would be forced to break off all diplomatic relations with Britain. As could have been expected, in October of 1952, just before Eisenhower’s election, the Iranian government officially severed diplomatic ties to Britain, forcing the British embassy workers to return home. Negotiations had not gained any traction except to confound Truman and to exacerbate British and Iranian stubbornness. Truman was

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20 Kinzer, 128-130.
21 Priouz, 492.
wholly unprepared to satisfy either party. He refused aid to both Britain’s plans to overthrow Mossadegh and Mossadegh’s petitions for American funding for the new nationalized oil industry. Neither side was interested in negotiations.

After this final breakdown in diplomatic relations, the crisis in Iran reached more radical and ominous depths. The movement of the U.S. from mediation toward intervention started before Eisenhower’s election to the presidency. What appears in history as a hasty and dramatic shift in policy was actually a long time in the making. The election 1952 merely acted as motivator and catalyst for action. The election of Eisenhower over Adlai Stevenson in November of 1952 ushered in a new conservative, Republican administration and Congress, which would prove to complement Winston Churchill’s reappointment to office and the rise of the Conservatives in Britain. Both men were far more comfortable with forceful, militaristic intervention tactics and ran on platforms of action. Perhaps most indicative of Eisenhower’s position as far as Iran was concerned was his 1955 Eisenhower Doctrine which vowed to protect the Middle East from international Communism. London had continued drafting elaborate plans, waiting for the U.S. to jump onboard. British foreign secretary Anthony Eden sent the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) station director in Tehran to Washington to feel out the American position. The tide seemed to be shifting against Mossadegh with the impending inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower and with the failure of the Shah to neutralize successfully Mossadegh politically.

22 Zahrani, 95.
America’s worst fears and Britain’s greatest opportunity were realized when the Iranian government legalized the Tudeh Party. This appeared to be Mossadegh’s welcome letter to the Soviets. The strength of the Tudeh had increased exponentially in Iran due to the economic and political instability of the nationalization crisis. Coupled with this nightmare was the increasingly bitter and spiteful rhetoric of Mossadegh concerning the U.S. To him it was evident that the U.S. was not only supporting Britain but was intentionally withholding aid to Iran, proving to be a hardly neutral player in the situation. Fear of Sovietization swelled in the new administration. As future Secretary of State under Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, explained in his 1950 treatise War or Peace, the force that had originally driven the Soviets out of Iran after the Second World War, was ultimately public opinion in the form of the United Nations who did not have the means for forcing the Soviets out militaristically. “…The continued presence of Soviet troops in Iran would, in effect, be aggression by a great power against a small power. The Soviet Union did not at that time care to flout that judgment, and moral power prevailed.”23 The growing fear was that should Iran extend the hand of anti-Western sentiment toward their Soviet neighbors, there would be no such “moral” incentive.

Added on top of the accruing tumult was the fast-depleting power of the Shah. With Mossadegh’s reclamation of the premiership, he was carried on by such a triumphant public sentiment that his defiance to the Shah escalated. Riding on soaring public clout, Mossadegh sent the Shah’s twin sister, Princess Ashraf into exile and the

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Shah himself was prohibited from direct contact with foreign diplomats.\textsuperscript{24} To an extent, Mossadegh was affirming in himself all the irrational and unsavory qualities the British had accused him of having, and the Americans were no longer feeling a pull to vie for him in any arena.

During Eisenhower’s administration, under John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, and his younger brother Allen, the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the CIA came to an unprecedented importance in international politics. “Working under the assumption that the Cold War had no rules and that longstanding American concepts of fair play must be reconsidered, the CIA became empowered to subvert, sabotage, and destroy our enemies.”\textsuperscript{25} Eisenhower was particularly a strong proponent of active CIA involvement in foreign policy as a means to curtail large-scale, open wartime tactics. By the time Eisenhower was sworn in, the Dulles brothers and several others had already been working toward cooperation with the British SIS toward a covert overthrow of the Iranian prime minister.

The engineer on the American end of the planning of Mossadegh’s overthrow was President Theodore Roosevelt’s grandson, Kermit Roosevelt. He was appointed director of Operation Ajax, as the coup came to be called. By the vocabulary used in his memoirs about this time in his career and the language used in the official Clandestine Service History write-up of the planning of the operation, it is clear that unified and invasive action was the preferred plan between CIA and SIS. As Kermit Roosevelt

\textsuperscript{24} Kinzer 128-133.

explained during the first of many meetings introducing the plan to the CIA in June of 1953, “If [the Soviets] could control Iran, they would control the Persian Gulf. This has been their dream, their chief ambition, ever since the days of Peter the Great.”

The American belief was that the political and economic issues of the current state of Iran were inextricably tied to each other and to an impending Soviet threat, which was being made evident through Mossadegh’s anti-Western platform. The conversation was changing from backing Britain as an ally to directly defending American political interests. The oil itself was seen as an essential political asset. Above all, there was a consensus that the Soviet threat was “indeed genuine, dangerous, and imminent” but that should the opportunity present itself, the people and the military would welcome back the Shah.

After Secretary of State John Foster Dulles informed the CIA that it was “not in American interests for the Mossadegh government to remain in power,” planning for Mossadegh’s removal began in March of 1952 and was completed by April of 1953.

Roosevelt’s plan was first to inform the Shah of the internationally supported operation and convince him of the necessity and safety for him formally to dismiss Mossadegh from the premiership. To do this, Roosevelt intended to use Princess Ashraf to persuade the Shah that he unquestionably had the support of both the American and British governments. The Shah would then replace Mossadegh with General Fazlollah Zahedi.


27 Roosevelt, 11-12.

his operation write up, Dr. Donald Wilbur described Zahedi as “the only person of stature who had consistently been openly in opposition to Mossadegh and who claimed any significant following.”29 After these elements were aligned, the operation was to be carried out on the ground level utilizing propaganda and an Iranian mob comprised of the royalists, and anti-Mossadegh faction, and the still-royalist military who had remained as yet unaffected by Mossadegh’s reforms, though he had tried to win control of them. The CIA planned to use all these elements to stage a popular demonstration in which Mossadegh would be seized and Zahedi, the Shah’s signature in hand, would declare the premiership.

Eisenhower signed off on the plan as soon as July. He had been known to encourage the CIA to “conduct widespread psychological warfare.”30 In this particular operation, this came in the form of articles and speeches in major American media sources which, when circulated in Iran contributed to the “war of nerves against Mossadeq.”31 The effects were significant pro-Shah sentiments in Iran. To some degree, these sentiments were not wholly synthesized by the CIA. Mossadegh was overreaching his popularity in detrimental ways that only aided this shift in public sentiment. In July of 1953, he and his National Frontists dissolved the Majlis. He looked specifically to the Tudeh Party for validation of this action. The religious leaders had also withdrawn their support of Mossadegh in reaction. Many members of the military had already aspired to overthrow the government in some way.

29 Ibid., vii.
30 Paterson, 277.
31 Wilbur, x.
When the first attempt at the coup went awry, the Shah fled to Baghdad for safety and then to Rome. Soon anti-royalists, provoked by Iranians as sponsored by the CIA, rioted in the streets under Tudeh pretenses and Mossadegh had no choice but to suppress them. In doing so he had engaged the military against his own supporters and effectively lost the support of the Tudeh Party. 32 His strongest support was neutralized and support for the Shah swelled. The myths surrounding the actual coup place the number of actual agents at five and offer scenes of “James Bond-type” operation centered out of a Tehran basement 33 in which Roosevelt had recruited “weightlifters as musclemen” in his organization of the Iranian street mob that was to enact the coup. 34 Roosevelt did succeed in lining up several officers loyal to the Shah to carry out the plan, instigate the mob, and arrest the Prime Minister. And on August 19, 1953, the pro-Shah demonstration resulted in the apprehension of Mossadegh and the handing over of the premiership to Zahedi. Mossadegh himself was tried in military court and escaped the death sentence, serving three years imprisonment and a life sentence of house arrest. 35

The events that made up the actual coup in 1953 represented only the tip of a much more complex iceberg of Cold War politics and international economic interests that never ceased to confound the U.S. The actions of Truman and Eisenhower respectively, while contextualized by their respective personalities, were more

35 Keddie, 130.
commanded by the actions of Britain and Iran respectively. At the earliest stages of the nationalization crisis, Truman was apt to sympathize with Mossadegh, but as Britain appealed for American intervention of a cooperative nature, President Truman made the deliberate decision to pursue diplomacy. The disparity in British, American, and Iranian priorities in the conversation condemned this position to failure. By the time Eisenhower took the office, all avenues of mediation had failed, sabotaged by British wrath and Iranian ambition. In reaction to the American-British alliance and its failure to meet Iran’s demands, Mossadegh began to spread anti-Western sentiment, challenge the Shah directly, and support the previously outlawed Communist Tudeh Party. Britain and Mossadegh himself had levied American involvement through Cold War rhetoric, emphasizing the possibility of a Soviet take-over in the event of Iranian economic and political chaos. Ironically, this chaos ensued at the hands of British sanctions and Mossadegh’s spite for the West. Thus the Communist element was deliberately brought into the picture. Once the CIA and Eisenhower were convinced of the correlation between the Iranian oil industry and Soviet aspirations in the Persian Gulf, plans were speedily drawn and approved. As the situation heated up, Mossadegh became even more radical in his reforms and in his opposition to the Shah, so much so that he essentially offered mortar with which the CIA laid the foundational bricks of the coup. Rhodri Jefferys-Jones suggests that “it cannot be taken for granted that Mossadegh would have survived but for the CIA’s intervention.”

36 Jeffereys-Jones, 90.
Through propaganda and invasive action taken by the CIA at the recommendation of Eisenhower and the Foster brothers, Iranian agents and the military carried out a seemingly organic overthrow of the Prime Minister that resulted in the reestablishment of the Shah’s authority and Iran’s allegiance economically and politically to the West, specifically America. Through reactionary efforts, always one step behind the political and economic aspirations of both the British and Mossadegh, mediation was never a viable option. And when forced to take a stand, the Cold War priority was always the utmost important, not only to Eisenhower but to Truman, as well, especially in the context of the Korean War. The shifting conversations were only amplified and accelerated by the change in Britain and the U.S. toward conservative, right-leaning administrations that were born in wartime tactics.

The coup, however, would set the precedent for American clandestine intervention throughout the world, only outside of the context of the hours of deliberation dedicated by Truman, Acheson, and the rest of the liberal administration. While the CIA at the time, and many people since, have attributed the coup and all it entailed to the flexing of a very brinkman muscle by Eisenhower and Roosevelt’s “Cowboys,” the state of play and the volatile condition under which Iran’s political and economic situation was governed by Mossadegh and his Frontist regime cannot be ignored.\(^{37}\) While the intentions of both Truman and Eisenhower for peacetime covert operations were very much observable in the steps leading up to the coup,\(^{38}\) in many ways the U.S. was

\(^{37}\) Jeffreys-Jones, 89.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 90.
cornered into action at this significant scale through failed reactionary measures resulting from commanded involvement on the part of both Britain and Iran.