

I regard it as part of a more extensive process. Subsequent to the Second World War, the United States played a role in political transformations and coups in numerous Latin American countries and other regions of the world. From this perspective, Iran was not an exception. The issue for the great powers was that an independent political model ought not to emerge in a country such as Iran; a model that could also serve as an inspiration for other countries.

Instances such as Cuba and Yugoslavia demonstrate that nationalist and socialist movements, under conditions of external pressure, might be propelled toward other camps. Consequently, the great powers did not desire a model independent of the two principal blocs of the Cold War to take shape.

In this context, what role did the Soviet Union play? Can it be stated that the Soviet Union had, in a certain sense, allowed the coup?

I contend that the Soviet Union did not adopt a position toward Iran's transformations that could be construed as serious support for Mosaddegh's cabinet. Concerning the existence of a formal agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States or Britain regarding

the coup, of course, one must speak with caution and examine more documents; but, from a practical standpoint, the Soviet Union's conduct during that period was not such that one could state it stood alongside Mosaddegh's cabinet with all its capacity. Economic issues and disputes concerning Iran's assets, as well as Soviet interests in northern Iran, are also noteworthy in this context.

One of the significant questions is that, if the Parliament had been dissolved, why did the attempt of August 16 fail?

On August 16, the Shah issued a decree dismissing Mosaddegh, and this decree was communicated to him by Colonel Nasiri; Mosaddegh, however, did not accept it, and Nasiri was arrested. Subsequent to the failure of this attempt, the Shah departed the country. At that juncture, the determinative factor, more than the popular base of either the Shah or Mosaddegh, was the structure of military power. The Shah did not possess an extensive popular base, and Mosaddegh had also lost a portion of his social base as a consequence of his dissension with the religious forces. Consequently, whoever could align the military with himself would acquire the upper hand.



People supporting the Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh participate in a demonstration after the failed coup attempt of August 16, 1953, in Tehran, Iran. ● THE GUARDIAN

What effect did the Shah's departure from Iran have on the course of events?

The Shah's departure created a significant vacuum in the structure of power. Had the Shah been arrested at that juncture, the conditions might have been entirely altered. Mosaddegh's cabinet, however, did not undertake such an action. A portion of this issue can be related to Mosaddegh's own character and background. He hailed from an aristocratic and courtly family,

and perhaps this very background caused him to entertain greater considerations in his confrontation with the Shah. In contrast, the experience of the 1979 Islamic Revolution demonstrated that, when the military structure confronts a political transformation, the manner in which political leaders deal with the military can prove determinative.

What were the most significant consequences of the coup d'état of August 19 for Iran's political structure? Can a connection be established between the coup and the 1979 Islamic Revolution?

In my opinion, a very serious connection exists. The coup d'état of August 19 facilitated the ground-

work for the formation of a more extensive type of political and security dependency upon the United States. Subsequent to the coup, American influence gradually increased in Iran's political, military, and security structure, and in subsequent decades, this dependency transformed into a serious issue for certain segments of society. The subject of capitulation right for American counselors and citizens is also examinable within this very framework. This matter, which was implemented in the 1960s, reinforced sentiments of humiliation and the impairment of national sovereignty among certain segments of society. For this reason, I contend that August 19 ought to be regarded as one of the significant factors in the formation of the political and social groundwork for the 1979 revolution.

That is to say, had the coup d'état of August 19 not occurred, could the trajectory of Iran's history have been different?

One cannot assert with certainty what would have transpired, but the probability that the trajectory of Iran's political developments would have been different was extremely high. The coup weakened the confidence of a portion of society in political and democratic process-

es and, conversely, augmented American influence and the security structure of the state. This process ultimately engendered extensive dissatisfactions that, in subsequent decades, became one of the significant grounds for the revolution.

In conclusion, is there any point that you believe has received insufficient attention in the examination of the coup d'état of August 19?

In my view, one of the most essential lessons of August 19 is that, in politics, one cannot address issues with naïveté. Politics is the arena for the calculation of power and interests, and if a government does not take threats seriously, the opportunity for redress may be lost. Mosaddegh, in certain instances, trusted excessively in the goodwill of the opposing party and conceived that one could proceed with foreign powers on the basis of logic and political agreement; while they were pursuing their own interests. This lesson is not exclusive to the year 1953. In foreign policy, whenever any indication of threat or foreign interference exists, one ought not to take it lightly. Historical experience demonstrates that disregard for such issues can entail extremely costly consequences for a country.

Setting record straight on Mosaddegh, nationalization of Iran's oil

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ANALYSIS

In recent years, particularly on the anniversaries of the late Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh's passing, the Nationalization Day of Iran's Oil Industry, and the coup d'état of August 19, 1953, we have witnessed writings and discourses that have criticized Mosaddegh with considerable vehemence. As long as the official documents of foreign institutions and governments remained classified, one could debate these criticisms and claims as hypotheses; however, with the declassification of the preponderance of pertinent documents, we ascertain that these assertions are for the most part predicated upon misunderstandings rather than upon logical reasoning grounded in documented evidence and scientific method. The objective of the present essay is to respond to these criticisms and to execute a comprehensive dissection of the key misunderstandings based upon multiple years of research and the review of hundreds of official documents that have been published in my book (for the specifications of documents cited in the essay, refer to the book). I shall address the question of why, after more than seven decades, certain individuals persist in distorting Mosaddegh's legacy.

Was the nationalization of the oil industry erroneous?

This assertion rests upon four misapprehensions and historiographical oversimplifications, a few of which include:

1. Did Iranian experts lack the capability to manage extraction operations and to exploit the complex installations of the Abadan refinery? This claim is utterly incongruent with the realities and the assessments of senior



Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh walks toward the tomb of the first US president George Washington during his visit to the United States. ● tichs.ir

foreign and domestic experts. For example, the senior experts of the World Bank, who had evaluated the operations of the Abadan refinery in 1951, arrived at the conclusion that local experts had efficiently inaugurated operations and possessed the capability to administer operations at lower levels up to approximately the middle capacity of the refinery. Furthermore, Alton Jones, the president of the American petroleum company Cities Service, who likewise evaluated the Abadan refinery's operations in 1952, deemed a mere 10 foreign technicians sufficient for restarting the refinery's installations up to a higher capacity. In addition to this, three young Iranian engineers who were active at the refinery at that time have confirmed this evaluation for me. According

to one of these gentlemen, Iranian engineers had succeeded in starting up one of the most complex petroleum machinery items newly arrived at that time, called the cracker, without any foreign assistance. This occurred despite the fact that British experts, prior to their departure from the refinery, had perpetrated sabotage upon several of its key installations in order to impede the resumption of operations.

2. It is claimed that it would have been preferable to reach an accommodation with the former "private" petroleum company, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), so that foreign exchange revenue from petroleum exports would not have been interrupted. One must examine what the documented evidence states on this matter. Critics who assert that it would have been preferable for Mosaddegh to have permitted the former company to participate as a partner in the operations of the National Iranian Oil Company, so that the country's petroleum rev-

enue would not have been cut off, were in fact prepared to retain a colonial power within the country so that it might continue its nefarious enterprise.

3. Many critics at that time, and even today, misconstrue the nationalization of petroleum as a financial or economic matter. It is occasionally claimed that it would have been preferable for the company to have remained in Iran and for Iran's petroleum revenue to have continued. However, for Mosaddegh, correctly, the question of oil constituted a political and moral issue — that is, the right of sovereignty and ownership of a nation over its natural resources. The conflict between Iran and Britain over petroleum did not conclude auspiciously because Britain's objective was the control of petroleum operations and the perpetuation of colonialism in Iran. Churchill was prepared to offer Iran a few additional shillings per barrel of petroleum, but he was not prepared to cede complete control of operations, exports, and finances to Iran. Simultaneously, Mosaddegh insisted that, in accordance with the provisions of the Petroleum Nationalization Law, Iran should retain control of operations in its own hands. The crucial point is that the positions of Churchill and Mosaddegh were irreconcilable because control of operations is not a matter over which one can bargain; one cannot, so to speak, say, let us split the melon in half; a country either possesses control of petroleum operations or it does not; here, the concept of flexibility for a solution predicated upon a half-and-half formula possesses no practical meaning. Mosaddegh was prepared to negotiate concerning compensation and other related subjects, but not concerning national sovereignty. The internal memorandum of the World Bank on this matter is ex-

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ceedingly illuminating. It basically said that the former company and the British government cannot permit the loss of control of operations — whether temporary or long-term; the Iranians know this and will resist. Furthermore, it is occasionally asserted that petroleum was not "nationalized" but rather "statized". If the critics' meaning is that extraction and refining operations did not fall into the hands of the private sector; these gentlemen must specify whether, at that time in Iran, there existed a private sector capable of providing the colossal capital required for petroleum operations and of administering its complex installations. At that time, Iran's private sector in the industrial domain consisted of a few relatively small enterprises with extremely limited operational capacity. That private sector lacked the capacity to produce even rudimentary industrial products, let alone the capability to administer the complex installations of petroleum extraction and its exploitation at the Abadan refinery, which was, at that time, the largest refinery in the world. In reality, only the state sector possessed the capacity for investment and management of petroleum operations in Iran. Only the state sector could safeguard Iran's national sovereignty in the name of the Iranian nation. Additionally, one must consider that ownership of petroleum resources and their exploitation operations in the majority of countries, even today, resides with governments. In the world, only in a few limited cases (the United States and Canada) does ownership of petroleum resources lie in the private sector; and only in a few other limited cases have exploitation operations of petroleum resources been managed by the private sector.

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