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978-1-107-07606-8 - Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks

Ali Rahnama

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Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran

Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks

Ali Rahnama's newest work is a meticulous historical reconstruction of the events surrounding the Iranian coup d'état of 1953 that led to the overthrow of Mohammed Mosaddeq and his government. Mosaddeq's removal from power has probably attracted more attention than any other event that occurred during his tenure because of the role of foreign involvement; the political, economic and social impact on Iran; and the long-term impact the ousting had on Iran–US relations.

Drawing on a wealth of American, British and Iranian sources, Rahnama closely examines the four-day period between the first failed coup and the second successful attempt, investigating in fine detail how the two coups were conceptualized, rationalized and then executed by players on both the Anglo-American and Iranian sides. Through painstaking research into little-studied sources, Rahnama casts new light on how a small group of highly influential pro-Britain politicians and power brokers with important connections revisited the realities on the ground with the CIA operatives dispatched to Iran and how they recalibrated a new – and ultimately successful – operational plan.

Ali Rahnama is Professor of Economics and director of the master's programme in Middle East and Islamic studies at the American University of Paris. His publications include *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics* (Cambridge, 2011) and *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*, second edition (2014).

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ALI RAHNEMA

The American University of Paris



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*To the memory of Amir Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr
Glowing Ray of Grace and Integrity*

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Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

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Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface and acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation</i>	xv
Introduction	I
1 The British reaction to Mosaddeq in power: “Mossie grabs Britain’s oil – but Navy to the rescue” (<i>Daily Express</i>)	II
2 Mosaddeq’s opposition strikes: testing tactics	34
3 Who beckoned and who executed on 28 February (9 Esfand)?	49
4 TPAJAX: company (CIA) commanders and firm (SIS) functionaries operationalizing the coup idea	60
5 The CIA-affiliated organizations: propaganda and combat	79
6 The precision coup flops: back to the drawing-board	95
7 Second coup capabilities of the military networks	110
8 A viable home-spun coup	124
9 The crucial last-minute preparations	138
10 The second coup begins with the pincer movement of the thugs	155
11 Coup agents occupying the city centre	174
12 Attacking ministries and pro-Mosaddeq buildings	193
13 The enigma of the tanks: betrayal or incompetence?	204
14 Mosaddeq overthrown	221
15 Religious representatives and the coup	235
	vii

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07606-8 - Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks

Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

16	Why did the second coup succeed?	249
17	Mosaddeq's exit: legal transfer of power or coup d'état?	270
	Conclusion	289
	<i>Biographical notes of key figures</i>	298
	<i>Bibliography</i>	311
	<i>Index</i>	315

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-07606-8 - Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks

Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface and acknowledgements

The historiography of the Mosaddeq era, let alone the overthrow of Mosaddeq, is in its infancy, as is our knowledge of this period. The growth of the infant has been stunted by the political atmosphere that came to reign after the removal of Mosaddeq. In the period immediately following 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad 1332) the official state position represented Mosaddeq as a power-hungry and demagogic statesman who had abused the well-founded nationalist sentiments of Iranians for his anti-constitutional, anti-monarchic and anti-democratic political ends. The victors of a struggle which had ended in the overthrow of Mosaddeq by violent means needed to explain – if not justify – their actions. At Mosaddeq's trial the military prosecutor, Hoseyn Azmudeh, accused the ousted Prime Minister of treason, dishonour, demagoguery, ruining the country, rebelling against the constitution, serving the interests of foreigners, attempting to overthrow the monarchy, founding a republic and, finally, seeking to become its President. The punishment for such crimes, if proven, was execution. Mosaddeq, however, was eventually sentenced to three years in prison.

By 24 September 1953, General Fazlollah Zahedi, the new Prime Minister, had “sent five messages to the Shah requesting that the Shah order the Military Tribunal to expedite the execution of Mossadeq and others”.¹ Even though the Shah decided that Mosaddeq should be tried and condemned to death, he vacillated between pardoning him and executing him.² It would be fair to assume that once the Shah decided against executing Mosaddeq

¹ National Security Archives, Co1383765, from Roosevelt, 24 September 1953. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/docs/Doc%2015%20-%201953-09-21%20Intrigues%20-%20Behbehani%20son%20-%20etc.pdf>.

² National Security Archives, Co1383775, from Roosevelt, 2 October 1953. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/docs/Doc%2015%20-%201953-09-21%20Intrigues%20-%20Behbehani%20son%20-%20etc.pdf>.

(probably because of the negative popular reaction that this would have provoked), he consciously decided to erase Mosaddeq from the collective memory of Iranians. This was an executive decision, which to the Shah served as an act of grace towards Mosaddeq, while ensuring his own place on the throne. Throwing a veil of ignorance over a key historical personality and period lest it rekindled sympathies for Mosaddeq, his ideas and memories of him required quelling the historiography of that period. While the lid was kept tightly on this sensitive period, suspicion, speculation and emotion ran wild among Iranians on what really had happened during those years and why and how it came to an end. The moratorium enforced by some self-censorship and much government censorship created ignorance, breeding intuitive convictions and certainties among those who had experienced Mosaddeq's period, along with a thirst for the truth among the younger generations.

How, why and by whom Mosaddeq was removed from office probably remained the most emotional, sensitive and elusive piece of the puzzle. The activities, arrangements and manoeuvres behind the overthrow of Mosaddeq remained opaque, controversial and complicated, especially because of the suspected role of foreign involvement. The putative foreign-involvement factor created two fundamental problems at the time, rendering proper research almost impossible. First, foreign archival sources, where traces or indications of such intervention could be found, verified or refuted, were not accessible; and second, research in Iran was inhibited by the fear that a serious study may provide evidence that the last act of the Mosaddeq play was indeed the outcome of direct foreign intervention. The Mosaddeq episode, especially its end-point, remained a major sore point, causing anxiety for Mohammad Reza Shah. The Shah's dilemma after the Mosaddeq episode was that as much as he wished to forget the unpleasant interlude, he was aware – and sometimes in the early post-Mosaddeq days was reminded – of the common urban perception that ousting Mosaddeq had been required to secure the economic and political interest of foreign powers.

On 29 December 1953, in a subtle fashion characteristic of a press under tight scrutiny, *Ferdowsi*, an Iranian weekly, demonstrated this common perception by publishing two pictures of the same size, one next to the other, under the title "News of the Week". On the right was a picture of an indignant Mosaddeq, with the caption beneath it stating that at 3 p.m. on 21 December, Mosaddeq's court, which was examining the events of 25 to 29 August, had entered its final deliberation and found Mosaddeq guilty. On the left was a picture of Denis Wright, with the caption beneath it stating that at 3:00 p.m. on 21 December Mr. Wright, the new British chargé d'affaires, and 14 British employees entered Tehran, and on the same night took charge of the British Embassy and started their business. The message was simply that Mosaddeq needed to be imprisoned in order for the British to return to Iran and pursue their interests.

Preface and acknowledgements

xi

The fall of Mohammad Reza Shah freed up the study of the Mosaddeq period in Iran. The freedom to reflect, speak out about and write on this epoch in Iran opened the door to the publication of all kinds of works – of differing quality – on Mosaddeq’s government and legacy. The second impediment was also partially removed as public access to important archives in the UK and the US, as well as key internal CIA reports, became available. A third factor further facilitated research on the details of the events: interviews with foreign and domestic players, especially Iranian dignitaries, who had left Iran after the 1979 revolution and who felt as though they could speak openly about the period, provided valuable information. A growing body of memoirs by Iranian personalities provided additional information, as did the publication of security files on key Iranian personalities by various Iranian organizations with access to these files. With the greater availability of Iranian newspapers and journals of the period at reference libraries in Iran and overseas, the task of an in-depth study based on corroboration and verification of events was facilitated. Some three and a half decades have elapsed since the Shah’s departure, and more than six decades since Mosaddeq’s. The historiography of the Mosaddeq era, by both Iranian and foreign scholars, has produced important academic works, mostly at the macro and general levels. Yet detailed micro studies and histories exposing and analysing the salient and central aspects of slices or frames of the period required for explaining the broad surveys are still rare.

The specific topic of Mosaddeq’s removal from power has probably attracted more attention than other aspects of his tenure. The unknowns surrounding Mosaddeq’s overthrow and its political, economic, as well as social and psychological impacts, must to some extent explain the interest in this period. The topic also provides a case study of a third-world country in the early 1950s challenging the interests of a hegemonic world power. The long-term consequences of Mosaddeq’s ousting for Iran–US relations has also stimulated interest in this period. Interest in this particular period of Mosaddeq’s government is mostly generated by the thirst to learn about whether the overthrow of Mosaddeq’s government was the result of a foreign, a purely domestic or a combined plan. How did it take shape? Who initiated it? Who pursued it? Who implemented it and how? Since there were no foreign soldiers involved in the overthrow, then in all three scenarios explanations need to be given as to who the Iranian organizers were, who the planners and perpetrators were and how the coup was carried out.

The results of such a study may feed into the political divide of pro- and anti-Mosaddeq partisans for whom “the truth” about how Mosaddeq was ousted vindicates their a priori judgement of the political nature of the other side. In the political psychology of Iranians, the overthrow of Mosaddeq created a binary perception of forces of light/good warring against the forces of darkness/evil. Pro-Mosaddeq forces accuse the opposing camp of colluding with foreigners and sacrificing the national interests of Iran and Iranians,

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Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

thereby betraying the oil nationalization movement. For them, Mosaddeq did not waiver from his dedication to upholding the Iranian Constitution, free elections and Iran's right to self-determination over her resources. They believe that Mosaddeq continued to enjoy the support of the people and could not have been removed from power without foreign intervention. His overthrow, they believe, was the price that Iran was forced to pay for pursuing her own economic and political interests. The supporters of Mosaddeq consider his overthrow to have been an act purposefully carried out at foreign instigation.

The anti-Mosaddeq camp generally views the oil nationalization movement as a positive and collective effort. Even though Mosaddeq's role in this process is not denied, his opponents place considerable emphasis on the contribution of figures such as Kashani, Makki and Baqa'i, as well as others who later turned against Mosaddeq. They maintain that even though Mosaddeq was an important figure in defending and obtaining Iran's right to economic and political self-determination, at some point during his tenure he deviated from the right path. His deviation is said to have started when he became dictatorial, seeking excessive executive powers. Mosaddeq is subsequently accused of treason, as he is said to have plotted to exile the Monarch, rebelled against the constitution by limiting the powers of the Monarch and the Majles, called for a referendum to dissolve the parliament, and caused the Monarch's departure from the country by defying his royal edict to step down and hand power over to General Zahedi. In tandem with the above charges goes the argument that once Mosaddeq disenfranchised his old religious (Kashani) and anti-Communist (Baqa'i) allies, he colluded with the Communists, gave them free rein in the country, paved the ground for a Communist takeover, and infuriated the highest ranking Shi'i dignitaries along with their pious followers. Mosaddeq's anti-Monarchism and his final intention to establish a republic is said to have been the last straw in causing his downfall.

For Mosaddeq's opponents, his overthrow was the punishment that the Iranian people meted out to him for his deviation, his rebellion against the constitution, his disrespect for the position of the Monarch in the constitution, and his intention to overthrow the Shah and trample over religious sensitivities. It was the outcome of a domestic crisis settled by domestic forces. Opponents of Mosaddeq minimize, partially ignore or totally deny the role of direct foreign involvement in his overthrow. Their case against Mosaddeq follows the arguments of Azmudeh, the Military Prosecutor at Mosaddeq's trial. They emphasize that Mosaddeq's overthrow was the logical outcome of the grievances of Shah-loving, religious and nationalist Iranians.

This book attempts to construct a detailed micro-history of the events that culminated in 28 Mordad (19 August). It is neither about Mosaddeq nor is it an inventory of his government's objectives, failures or achievements; rather, it is about his overthrow and the context of this. Mosaddeq and his associates

Cambridge University Press

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Ali Rahnama

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface and acknowledgements*

xiii

and opponents did trigger events, react to them and interact with them; hence, any study of the overthrow has to engage with Mosaddeq and his supporters as well as with those who overthrew them, reporting, assessing and analysing the positions and acts of both sides. On the basis of the evidence researched and employed, this study will eventually have to demonstrate whether Mosaddeq's removal from power was intended and initiated by foreigners or not, and whether it was a coup, a revolution, a spontaneous national uprising, or something other. In the prevailing polarization of positions, any conclusion is likely to summon a verdict of pro-Mosaddeq or anti-Mosaddeq on the work, as well as on its author. As with any history of social and political conflict, recounting the history of 28 Mordad will ruffle feathers and provoke judgements. The present history of 28 Mordad is intended for those who are curious about what happened during that day and how it came about.

In writing this book I am intellectually indebted to many people. Ahmad Ashraf played an important role in prompting me to write this book. I appreciate his role as a learned and inspiring interlocutor: a mentor. Yahya Dehganpour not only helped me find the books that I needed, but one lazy summer afternoon, having fished in his basement for old newspapers and magazines which he remembered having collected from the 1952–1953 period, presented me with a treasure-trove: three large plastic bags filled with rare dust-covered magazines of the time, full of pertinent and precious information. Researching periodicals and books in the National Library of Iran was greatly facilitated by Pouran Soltani, to whom I am always indebted for my research, and by the library staff, for whose generous help I am grateful.

While working on the events of 19 August (28 Mordad) I became ever more conscious that I needed a plan of Tehran in order to visualize the movement of the various actors, why they went where they went, and the logic behind their choices of points of congregation. Firouz Bagherzadeh, a true gentleman-scholar, helped me out by providing me with three maps of Tehran, which enabled me to visualize the events and the logic behind them more concretely. The clarity which the maps provided convinced me of the necessity of a map-history of 19 August. This was realized by René Caoutte, a student in Art History at the American University of Paris, who patiently and efficiently worked on the maps, designed and re-designed the icons, labelled the streets when they were missing, and finally put life and history into the four maps, which have since found their way into the public domain. I am most grateful to her. I am thankful to Zahra for working over the self-explanatory cover picture and to Reza for helping out with the indexing.

I have benefitted from the scholarly generosity and indulgence of many. Abdollah Anvar, John Gurney and Fereydoun Rashidiyan read the first draft of this book, which greatly benefitted from their sharp eyes for details, errors and omissions and subsequently from their precise suggestions, comments and recommendations. Mark Gasiorowski and Ali Gheissari read the text closely,

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

Preface and acknowledgements

commented on it, and provided me with references which I had overlooked. I am thankful to them. Also, Daniel Gunn kindly applied his magical editing skills to the text and rendered it much more readable than it was.

In conclusion, may I suggest that readers glance over the chronology before reading the main text.

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation

- 27 April 1951:** Mosaddeq becomes Prime Minister after the parliament's (Majles') vote of confidence.
- 29 April 1951:** The Majles ratifies the implementation of the oil nationalization law.
- 5 May 1951:** Herbert Morrison (the British Foreign Secretary) asserts that "it is open to us to retaliate economically or militarily against Persia".
- 16 May 1951:** The US administration opposes the British use of force in Iran.
- 21 May 1951:** The British idea of an indefinite military occupation of Southern Iran's oil fields is tabled by the British government.
- 10 June 1951:** The Iranian flag is hoisted on top of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Khorramshahr.
- June 1951:** Mrs Lambton suggests that Robin Zaehner, a covert operation agent in Iran, would be the ideal person to contact Iranians friendly to the British cause and create the atmosphere conducive to a regime change.
- 25 June 1951:** Eric Drake, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's manager in Tehran, leaves for Basra.
- 26 June 1951:** Morrison informs the US Ambassador in the UK that the Shah should dismiss Mosaddeq and dissolve the Majles.
- 28 June 1951:** Francis Shepherd, British Ambassador to Iran, writes to the Foreign Office, stating that "we must now do all we can to hasten Mosaddeq's departure".
- Late June 1951:** Operation Buccaneer, involving the direct intervention of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Army, is under consideration by the British Cabinet.
- 12 July 1951:** Hillier-Fry of the British Embassy in Tehran recommends that "the strong-arm or rough neck side of the party [Seyyed Zia's National Will Party] should be organized as soon as possible".
- 19 July 1951:** British deployment of forces to the region. Three brigades of airborne troops are flown to the base at Shaiba in Iraq and the Persian Gulf

xvi *The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation*

squadron is strengthened by three frigates and four destroyers from the Mediterranean.

Summer 1951: For the purpose of occupying Abadan, an Armada is assembled at the mouth of Shatt-al-Arab in Iraqi waters, under British control.

23 July 1951: The occupation of Abadan is again considered as an option by the British Cabinet.

27 September 1951: Attlee completely abandons the idea of a military operation, arguing that the US government's attitude prevented the British from using force.

29 September 1951: The Shah informs Henderson, the US Ambassador to Iran, that Ayatollah Borujerdi has aligned himself with Mosaddeq on the oil issue and sent a message that all Iran must stand together in the face of British threats, and if Britain should invade the country Iranians must present a solid front.

1 October 1951: Zaehner of the British Embassy in Tehran informs the Foreign Office that Ayatollah Borujerdi has sent a message to the Shah announcing his complete support for Mosaddeq's government.

6 October 1951: Mosaddeq leaves for New York to attend the UN Security Council meeting.

14 October 1951: Pyman of the British Embassy in Iran says: "We thought that Seyyed Zia was the best person to put the country on its feet, but we were not opposed to other candidates, including Zahedi".

15 October 1951: Mosaddeq presents Iran's case before the Security Council.

4 November 1951: Anthony Eden informs Secretary Acheson that the US proposal on the oil issue, seemingly acceptable to the Iranians, is totally unacceptable to the British Government, and that "if Mossadeq fell, there was a real possibility that a more amenable Government might follow".

10 November 1951: Following the British rejection of the US proposal on the oil issue, Dean Acheson reports that the cardinal purpose of British policy is not to prevent Iran from going Communist, but is to preserve what is believed to be the last remaining bulwark of British solvency – that is, British overseas investments and property position.

26 December 1951: Henderson reports that the Shah has thought about a replacement for Mosaddeq. In the absence of organized effective opposition to Mosaddeq in the country, he did not see how any change could be effected except by a coup. A successful coup must be followed, at least temporarily, by a dictatorial regime, but the Shah did not know who could be trusted to head such a regime.

10 January 1952: Seyyed Ziaeddin Tabataba'i informs Middleton, the British chargé d'affaires in Tehran, that "there might be no solution except a coup d'état".

18 February 1952: Hoseyn Fatemi, the powerful assistant to Mosaddeq, is shot at by Abde-Khoda'i of the Fadaiyan Eslam.

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation xvii

- 20 February 1952:** Major R. Jackson of the British Embassy reports that: “The industrial guilds which may be said to be anti-government – and which could be used against the government if so desired – are the following: Bakers, Butchers, Confectioners, Loaf Sugar makers”.
- 11 March 1952:** Pyman of the British Embassy in Tehran reports that: “Zahedi and Kashani have recently exchanged visits”.
- 27 April 1952:** The newly elected 17th Majles begins work.
- 24 May 1952:** ‘Ala confers with Henderson on whether the Shah should bring about the fall of Mosaddeq when the latter is still in Hague or whether he should wait until the prime minister returns.
- 27 May 1952:** The Shah tells ‘Ala that “steps must be taken in the near future to have Mosaddeq replaced”.
- 28 May 1952:** Mosaddeq leaves for the Hague to attend the International Court of Justice.
- 12 June 1952:** In his discussion with Henderson, the Shah discusses the possibility of Saleh, Mansour and Qavam as successors to Mosaddeq.
- 24 June 1952:** Mosaddeq returns to Tehran.
- 5 July 1952:** Mosaddeq presents the Shah with the letter of resignation of his government.
- 6 July 1952:** 52 out of 65 Members of the Parliament (Majles) present a vote that Mosaddeq is their preference to succeed Mosaddeq!
- 16 July 1952:** Mosaddeq hands his resignation to the Shah over the latter’s insistence that the Minister of War be appointed by the Shah. Mosaddeq had appointed himself as Minister of War.
- 17 July 1952:** The Majles votes in favour of Ahmad Qavam as the new Prime Minister. Qavam has the full support of Henderson and Middleton.
- 18 July 1952:** Demonstrations in favour of Mosaddeq are held in front of the Majles; Qavam issues his famous stern declaration that the “Captain has decided on a new course”.
- 20 July 1952:** Ayatollah Kashani issues a powerful declaration against Qavam and invites the people to return Mosaddeq to power.
- 21 July 1952:** Tehran witnesses huge demonstrations and the army opens fire on the people. ‘Ala informs Middleton that the British have underestimated Mosaddeq’s popularity and that at this time only the resignation of Qavam and the return of Mosaddeq can calm public opinion.
- 21 July 1952:** At 5:00 p.m. Tehran radio announces Qavam’s resignation.
- 22 July 1952:** At 9:00 a.m. 61 out of 63 MPs present at the Majles vote in favour of Mosaddeq as the new Prime Minister.
- 22 July 1952:** The International Court of Justice upholds Iran’s claim that the Court does not have jurisdiction in the Iranian oil nationalization case, by nine votes to five.
- 26 July 1952:** Seyyed Zia meets Sam Falle of the British Embassy and, having emphasized that a “satisfactory agreement” with Mosaddeq is impossible, suggests ousting him as soon as possible by using the army.

xviii *The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation*

- 26 July 1952:** John Fearnley, of the British Embassy in Tehran, reports that General Zahedi is “very anxious to co-operate with this Embassy” and “that he hoped that Mr Middleton would appreciate his (Zahedi’s) genuine desire to co-operate with us”.
- 27 July 1952:** Mosaddeq introduces his new cabinet and Ayatollah Kashani opposes some of his appointees.
- 27 July 1952:** Asadollah Rashidiyan meets Sam Falle and recommends “a coup d’état in support of General Zahedi”.
- 27 July 1952:** Middleton sends a telegram to the Foreign Office suggesting an immediate “military coup d’état” to remove Mosaddeq again. In his mind such a coup will “need active encouragement and possibly support from outside”.
- 28 July 1952:** Mehdi Mirashrafi meets Sam Falle and recommends a rapid, violent coup d’état against Mosaddeq, while suggesting himself as leader of the coup. Falle reports to his superiors that Mirashrafi should be enlisted and encouraged to cooperate with Zahedi.
- 28 July 1952:** Middleton concludes that: “It now looks as though the only thing to stop Persia falling into communist hands is a coup d’état”. Middleton adds that “There is no outstanding candidate though General Zahedi has apparently entered himself in the lists and might well be adequate”.
- 31 July 1952:** Henderson writes to the Department of State that he and Middleton believe that “it did not seem likely [that] any alternative to Mosaddeq could be brought into power except by [a] military *coup d’état* ... that army officers who seemed to best fitted for leadership effecting [a] *coup d’état* were General Zahedi and General Hedjazi ... Both Middleton and I agreed that neither British nor American Government should undertake to encourage or support [a] *coup d’état* and that our two Embassies should not become involved in any way”.
- 3 August 1952:** The Majles accords Mosaddeq extraordinary legislative powers for the duration of six months.
- 6 August 1952:** Anthony Eden writes to Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador to Washington, stating that the UK and the US need to find “a local Neguib” to resolve the problems in Persia.
- 6 August 1952:** “With respect to current talk of the possibility of a coup d’état, Mr. Bruce (The Acting Secretary of State) feels that [it] was practically impossible, since there was no leadership capable of taking over, especially with the prestige of the army diminished”.
- 7 August 1952:** Sam Falle of the British Embassy in Tehran reports that he has met with Zahedi and that the General claims that “he has support in the army”.
- 9 August 1952:** Disagreeing with the US government’s proposal to offer a grant of between \$10 and \$30 million to Mosaddeq, Anthony Eden informs Dean Acheson that: “there are signs among the generals of a feeling that the Army,

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation xix

whose morale is reported to be improving and which remains loyal to the Throne may have to intervene”.

- 16 August 1952:** Churchill writes to Truman that, in the name of Anglo-American unity, “I hope you will do your best to prevent American help for Mosaddeq either Governmental or commercial”.
- 18 August 1952:** Truman responds to Churchill: “I hope you will be willing to accept Iran nationalization law . . . If Iran goes down [the] communist drain, it will be little satisfaction to any of us that legal positions were defended to [the] last”.
- 23 August 1952:** Mosaddeq forces 136 officers of the Iranian Armed forces into retirement.
- 25 August 1952:** Mosaddeq informs Henderson that the “Britishers” who have underplayed the importance of the government’s financial difficulties and suggested delaying help to Iran “really hoped, and were working, for some kind of *coup d'état*”, and he adds that if the British do not respond by 27 August to his note of 7 August he will sever diplomatic relations with them.
- 3 September 1952:** Sam Falle of the British Embassy in Tehran reports that “I saw General Zahedi today and found him full of the joys of Spring”.
- 20 September 1952:** Henderson informs the State Department that “Hints of *coup d'état* or resort to tactics of violence are becoming more open”.
- 25 September 1952:** Middleton reports a three hour meeting between Kashani and Zahedi.
- 30 September 1952:** According to Middleton’s assessment, “Kashani would like to see Mosaddeq removed, if he could be quite certain that this would not damage his position”.
- 13 October 1952:** Hoseyn Fatemi, the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, announces the arrest of General Hejazi, Habibollah, Asadollah and Qodratollah Rashidiyan in relation to a coup plot in collusion with a “foreign embassy”. He names General Fazlollah Zahedi, Mozaffar Baqa’i, Ebrahim Khajehnoori and Mehdi Farrokh, who have parliamentary immunity, as other members of this conspiracy.
- 18 October 1952:** The daily *Ettela'at* reports on a secret meeting during the previous week at which George Middleton, the British chargé d'affaires, was among those plotting a coup.
- 18 October 1952:** The pro-Tudeh Party dailies call on the government to react harshly to Zahedi and the other plotters, calling for their arrest and execution.
- 22 October 1952:** Iran severs diplomatic relations with the UK.
- November 1952:** British intelligence agents approach Kermit Roosevelt in London, informing him that they are thinking of “nothing less than the overthrow of Mosaddeq” and that they wished to start immediately.
- Mid-November 1952:** Montague Woodhouse, the SIS station chief in Tehran before the severance of diplomatic relations, arrives in Washington with

xx *The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation*

- the plan for “Operation Boot”. Woodhouse tries to convince American officials that Mosaddeq “must be removed” and finds “sympathetic hearing within the CIA, but less so in the State department”.
- November–December 1952:** Representatives of British Intelligence meet Near East and Africa (NEA) Division representatives in Washington. At this meeting, British Intelligence representatives (Montague Woodhouse, Samuel Falle and John Lockhart) “brought up the proposition of a joint action to remove Prime Minister Mosaddeq”.
- 2 December 1952:** Three senior American officials and two members of the British Embassy meet at the State Department and the senior American official categorically declares that “the State Department did not rule out the possibility of joint action of the kind we [the British] contemplated”.
- 19 December 1952:** Eden urges the Americans “in the strongest manner” to postpone a \$25 million loan from the Export-Import Bank to Iran.
- 22 December 1952:** Eden thanks Acheson for deferring the consideration of the Export-Import loan to Iran.
- 6 January 1953:** Mosaddeq receives a strong vote of confidence from the Majles (64 out of 65) after the Kashani-Baqa’i faction in parliament attempts to curb his powers through a bill.
- 7 January 1953:** Mosaddeq requests the prolongation of his extraordinary legislative powers by one year.
- 18 January 1953:** Kashani strongly opposes Mosaddeq’s request.
- 19 January 1953:** The Majles votes in favour of prolonging Mosaddeq’s extraordinary legislative powers (59 votes from 67 MPs present).
- 20 January 1953:** Colonel Kamal, the Chief of Police and close to Kashani, is replaced by Lieutenant General Mahmud Afshartus.
- 20 January 1953:** General Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican candidate, is inaugurated as President of the US.
- 14 February 1953:** Iranian newspapers report that Abolqasem Khan Bakhtiyari has rebelled against the government, attacking an army column and killing 42 military personnel.
- 14 February 1953:** Mosaddeq informs Henderson that the “British while pretending that they desired settlement were using their numerous Iranian contacts to overthrow him through alliances of forces including Bakhtiyari and other tribal elements, fanatical religious groups led by irresponsible mullahs, disgruntled reactionary elements in the army and bureaucracy, discredited politicians and Communist front organizations”.
- 19 February 1953:** Mosaddeq sends word to the Shah through an emissary that “he could no longer tolerate the unfriendly attitude of the Shah and Court and that he would resign on 24 February and make a public announcement to that effect”.
- 19 February 1953:** Mosaddeq sends word to the Shah that he believes that the Court and the Shah are intriguing against him through the Bakhtiyaris and the retired army officers.

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation xxi

- 21 February 1953:** ‘Ala meets Mosaddeq and informs him that the Shah is prepared to leave the country and stay abroad until Mosaddeq requests his return. Mosaddeq responds that the Shah should not leave the country. ‘Ala meets with Kashani and Kashani is pleased with the situation.
- 21 February 1953:** The British decide “to gradually taper off” the monthly sum of £10,000 which the Rashidiyans have received for the past 18 months. They instruct the Rashidiyans to “to give up their operational plans and devote themselves entirely to intelligence”. The Rashidiyans refuse to follow their instructions.
- 22 February 1953:** The Shah is thinking of General Zahedi and Allahyar Saleh as possible replacements for Mosaddeq, even though he does not “fully trust Zahedi”.
- 24 February 1953:** Mosaddeq promises not to press his grievances against the Shah. Differences between Mosaddeq and the Shah are reconciled. According to ‘Ala, Kashani, Baqa’i and Makki are not happy with the reconciliation.
- 24 February 1953:** Ardeshir Zahedi informs a member of the American Embassy that his father (General Zahedi) may become Prime Minister in the next few days and that he has already chosen his ministers.
- 25 February 1953:** The Shah decides to leave the country as soon as possible.
- 25 February 1953:** General Zahedi is arrested. His arrest is said to be in connection with his attempt to overthrow the government.
- 28 February 1953:** From around 10:00 a.m. news of the Shah’s imminent departure spreads through the city. The second wave of rumours is that the Shah is resigning.
- 28 February 1953:** There are organized demonstrations by Behbahani, Kashani, and retired as well as active army officers in front of the Shah’s palace to prevent him from leaving.
- 28 February 1953:** The demonstrators, including the ruffians of South Tehran and members of the Zahmatkeshan, Ariya, SUMKA and Zolfaqar parties, attack Mosaddeq’s house, which is in the vicinity of the Shah’s palace, trying to break through the gates of Mosaddeq’s house and forcing him to flee.
- 28 February 1953:** Under pressure from the crowd surrounding his house and demanding that he should cancel his trip abroad, at 3:00 p.m. the Shah informs his supporters that he will not leave the country.
- 29 February 1953:** The opponents of Mosaddeq gather at Baharestan and clash with Mosaddeq’s supporters, while at around noon approximately 300 anti-Mosaddeq demonstrators (mainly from the Ariya Party) try to launch an attack on Tehran Radio’s Broadcasting Station.
- 30 February 1953:** Clashes between pro- and anti-Mosaddeq demonstrators continue in Tehran, but they gradually die out as pro-Mosaddeq forces take the upper hand. A number of demonstrators actively involved in the attack on Mosaddeq’s house on 28 February, including army officers and key thug leaders, are arrested.

xxii *The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation*

- 4 March 1953:** At the 135th meeting of the National Security Council in Washington, Eisenhower presses for supporting Mosaddeq's government against the possibility of a Communist takeover by persuading the British to leave the Americans to deal with the Iranians and permit the US to put the Iranian oil industry back in operation. The President and Secretary Dulles view the British as an impediment to resolving the oil issue and saving Iran from falling into Communist hands. Eisenhower says that if he had \$500,000,000 of money to spend in secret, he would give \$100,000,000 of it to Iran "right now".
- 6 March 1953:** Henderson reports from Tehran that the "possibility and advisability of attempting [a] military *coup d'état* continues [to] be surreptitiously discussed".
- 10 March 1953:** Henderson reports that "Mosaddeq would prefer Iran [to] become some kind [of a] republic under his dictatorial control".
- 10 March 1953:** Baqa'i and Ha'erizadeh insist that 28 February happened as the result of Mosaddeq's plan to change the regime, overthrow the constitutional monarchy and impose a dictatorship.
- 11 March 1953:** At the 136th meeting of the National Security Council, Eisenhower says that "he had very real doubts whether, even if we tried unilaterally, we could make a successful deal with Mosaddeq ... the example might have grave effects on US oil concessions in other parts of the world".
- 17 March 1953:** General Zahedi is released.
- Mid to late March 1953:** "General Walter Bedell Smith, Undersecretary of State, determined that the US Government could no longer approve of the Mosaddeq government and would prefer a successor ... The change in policy was communicated to [the] CIA and the NEA Division was informed that it was authorized to consider operations which would contribute to the fall of the Mosaddeq government".
- 18 March 1953:** British Intelligence is informed that the CIA is in a position to discuss "detailed tactics".
- 31 March 1953:** 'Ala reports to Henderson that "practically all elements really concerned regarding future stability [in] Iran were now convinced" that "energetic steps" needed to be taken "to overthrow Mosaddeq in the immediate future". "Most [of] these elements believed [that the] only person available to replace Mosaddeq was General Zahedi ... Zahedi would have [the] support [of] such political leaders as Kashani, Ha'erizadeh, Baqa'i, [and the] Zolfaqari brothers as well as more conservative elements and [the] army".
- 31 March 1953:** 'Ala asks Henderson on behalf of the "group interested in [the] overthrow [of the] Mosaddeq government" whether the US government still supports Mosaddeq?" Henderson responds: "U.S. Government could not be associated with [a] *coup d'état*. If patriotic Iranians should consider [a] coup necessary in order [to] save Iran, they

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation xxiii

should act on their own responsibility and not expect any foreign power to become involved in such venture”.

- 31 March 1953:** Henderson reports to the State Department that since Mosaddeq “seems persistently to be leading Iran towards disaster, [the] risks involved in change would not be too great”.
- 4 April 1953:** “The [CIA] Director approved a budget of \$1,000,000 which could be used by the Tehran Station in any way that would bring about the fall of Mosaddeq”.
- 16 April 1953:** “A comprehensive study entitled: ‘Factors Involved in the Overthrow of Mosaddeq’ is completed. The study indicates that a Shah–General Zahedi combination, supported by the CIA local assets and financial backing, would have a good chance of overthrowing Mosaddeq, particularly if this combination should be able to get the largest mobs in the streets and if a sizable portion of the Tehran garrison refused to carry out Mosaddeq’s orders”.
- 20 April 1953:** Afshartus, the powerful pro-Mosaddeq Chief of Police, is abducted.
- 26 April 1953:** Afshartus’ dead body is discovered; a group of military officers, in addition to Zahedi, Baqa’i and Khatibi, are implicated in the murder.
- End of April 1953:** Donald Wilber is selected to go to Nicosia, Cyprus, and draw up a plan for the overthrow of Mosaddeq, in close collaboration with SIS.
- 4 May 1953:** Iranian authorities seek to question General Zahedi about the murder of Afshartus. He seeks sanctuary at the parliament and is welcomed by Kashani, the Speaker of the parliament.
- 13 May 1953:** In Nicosia, representatives of the CIA and SIS begin discussions to draft the first TPAJAX operational plan for the overthrow of Mosaddeq. The meeting ends on 30 May.
- 20 May 1953:** The CIA Tehran station is authorized to spend “one million rials (90 rials to the US Dollar) per week” for the purpose of purchasing “the cooperation of members of the Iranian Majles”.
- 25 May 1953:** Henderson informs Mosaddeq that Secretary of State Dulles, who is on a Middle East visit, regrets the fact that he will not be able to visit Tehran.
- 30 May 1953:** The Shah informs Henderson that Zahedi is acceptable to him as a replacement for Mosaddeq only if: “a) he would come into office through legal, parliamentary means; b) he would come in with [a] wide measure of public support; c) he would be acceptable to [the] US and UK and either [the] US or US and UK would be prepared to give [the] new government emergency financial as well as massive economic aid”.
- 31 May 1953:** Henderson leaves Tehran for Washington.
- 9–14 June 1953:** CIA personnel involved in the overthrow project (Kermit Roosevelt, Carroll, Roger Goiran and Wilber) gather in Beirut to consolidate the operational plan.

- 15 June 1953:** Roosevelt and Wilber arrive in London and meet their British counterparts to produce the “London” Draft of the TPAJAX operational plan.
- 25 June 1953:** At a meeting of 11 high-powered government, diplomatic, military and secret service officials in Washington attended by Allen and John Foster Dulles (Director of the CIA and Secretary of State), General Walter Bedell Smith (Undersecretary of State and Allen Dulles’ predecessor at the CIA), Charles Wilson (Secretary of Defense), Loy Henderson (the American Ambassador to Iran) and Kermit Roosevelt, the plan to overthrow Mosaddeq is given official approval.
- 11 July 1953:** The directors of SIS and CIA, along with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Eisenhower, approve of Operation TPAJAX.
- 13 July 1953:** Mattison, the US chargé d’affaires in Iran, writes about “reports circulating that the Prime Minister may ask for [a] referendum presumably in the streets, and may attempt [to] dissolve Majles”.
- 14 July 1953:** Mosaddeq’s cabinet agrees to put the question of continuation or dissolution of the 17th Majles to a national referendum.
- 15 July 1953:** Asadollah Rashidiyan meets Princess Ashraf in France and seeks her help to put the overthrow plan in motion.
- 16 July 1953:** Stephen Meade of the CIA and Norman Darbyshire of the SIS meet with Princess Ashraf and ask her to inform the Shah of the plot and secure his participation.
- 19 July 1953:** Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA-designated chief of the overthrow operation, secretly arrives in Tehran from Iraq.
- 20 July 1953:** Zahedi leaves the Majles for a hideout and is in direct contact with the CIA station in Tehran.
- 21 July 1953:** George Carroll, a CIA paramilitary expert responsible for the military planning of the overthrow operation, arrives in Tehran.
- 24 July 1953:** The Secretary of State asks his brother Allen Dulles (director of the CIA) whether “the other matter is off”. Allen Dulles responds that “he doesn’t talk about it, it was cleared directly with the President, and is still active”. Allen Dulles then adds that the Shah is an “unaccountable character but the sister has agreed to go”. The “other matter” is a direct reference to the coup plan.
- 25 July 1953:** Princess Ashraf flies to Tehran to try to meet with her brother.
- 26 July 1953:** General Norman Schwarzkopf arrives in Tehran to obtain two royal edicts from the Shah.
- 30 July 1953:** Asadollah Rashidiyan begins the first of his six meetings with the Shah, briefing him on all aspects of the overthrow plot and assuring him that the US and the UK are collaborating on this plan. These meetings last until 9 August.
- 5 August 1953:** In a speech in Seattle (Washington), President Eisenhower says that Mosaddeq has “moved towards getting rid of his parliament

The coup d'état chronology: from idea to implementation xxv

and of course he was in that move supported by the Communist party of Iran”.

- 8 August 1953:** Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA-designated chief of the overthrow operation, meets secretly with the Shah for the second time.
- 9 August 1953:** Hasan Akhavi has the first of his two meetings with the Shah, during which he presents “the name of the army officers who were ready to take action upon the receipt of an order from the Shah”.
- 13 August 1953:** The Ministry of Interior announces the final results of the referendum: 2,043,389 votes in favour of dissolving the Majles and 1,207 votes against.
- 16 August 1953:** At 7:00 a.m. Radio Tehran announces that a coup d'état against the Mosaddeq government was attempted the previous night but was successfully foiled.
- 17 August 1953:** At 10:15 a.m. the Shah arrives in Baghdad from his Caspian Palace on board a Beechcraft, accompanied by a pilot, one palace official and Queen Soraya.
- 17 August 1953:** Berry, the US Ambassador to Iraq, informs the State Department that the Shah has told him that: “when a fortnight ago it was suggested that he sponsor a military coup he accepted the idea. However, in giving it more thought he decided that such action as he took must be within the framework of his constitutional power, hence, not a coup. Thus, ... [he] decided to appoint General Zahedi as Prime Minister in place of Mosaddeq ... The Shah said that he is utterly at a loss to understand why the plan failed. Trusted Palace officials were completely sure of its succeeding”.
- 17 August 1953:** Ambassador Henderson, who was present at the high-level meeting of 25 June in Washington which gave the green light for the coup in Iran, returns to Tehran after two and a half months of absence.
- 17 August 1953:** Within the US Embassy compound, Roosevelt, Carroll, the Zahedis (father and son), Gilanshah, Farzanegan and the three Rashidiyan brothers meet for four hours. This “council of war” decides that “some action would be taken on Wednesday the 19th”.
- 18 August 1953:** Undersecretary of State Smith writes to the President that “The move failed because of three days of delay and vacillation by the Iranian generals concerned, during which time Mosaddeq apparently found out all that was happening. Actually it was a *counter-coup*, as the Shah acted within his constitutional power in signing the *farman* replacing Mosaddeq”.
- 19 August 1953:** Henderson reports that “Morning August 19 supporters [of the] Shah had arranged a pro-Shah demonstration for [the] purpose of showing [that] sentiment continued [to] exist in [the] country for him”. By evening Zahedi is in power and Mosaddeq has been overthrown.