Focusing on the turbulent twenty-eight months between April 1951 and August 1953, this book, based on recently declassified CIA and US State Department documents from the Mossadeq administration, tells the story of the Iranian oil crisis, which would culminate in the coup of August 1953. Throwing fresh light on US involvement in Iran, Ervand Abrahamian reveals exactly how immersed the USA was in internal Iranian politics long before the 1953 coup, in parliamentary politics, and even in saving the monarchy in 1952. By weighing rival explanations for the coup, from internal discontent, a fear of communism, and oil nationalization, Abrahamian shows how the Truman and Eisenhower administrations did not differ significantly in their policies towards Mossadeq, and how the surprising main obstacle to an earlier coup was the shah himself. In tracing the key involvement of the USA and the CIA in Iran, this study shows how the 1953 coup would eventually pave the way to the 1979 Iranian revolution, two of the most significant and widely studied episodes of modern Iranian history.

Ervand Abrahamian was Distinguished Professor of History at Baruch College and Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is the author of several books including Iran Between Two Revolutions (1982) and A History of Modern Iran (2018). He was elected in 2010 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
Oil Crisis in Iran

From Nationalism to Coup d’Etat

ERVAND ABRAHAMIAN
City University of New York
For Ali and Heda
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Preface

People will say, or even write, the most fantastic nonsense about their own thoughts and intentions, to say nothing of deliberate lies.

Lewis Namier on Diplomatic Documents

This book was prompted by the recent publication of US government documents on Iran for the Mossadeq period – the turbulent twenty-eight months from April 1951 to August 1953. Declassified in November 2017 – long beyond the thirty-year rule, these documents were published in the annual State Department series entitled Foreign Relations of the United States – better known as the FRUS. Even as late as 1978, the UK had sought US assurances that such documents would not implicate Britain in the “removal of Musaddiq in 1953.” “In the current situation,” the British warned, “there is a good chance that public opinion will once again focus on that chapter of Iranian history. We hope therefore that the US administration would agree on a joint approach to minimize the damage which could be done to our interests by the release of US records.”¹

This new FRUS volume contains 375 documents totaling some 1,000 pages. It includes extensive cables, reports, notes, minutes, and memoranda not only from the State Department and the US Embassy, but also from the US Cabinet, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council (NSC) – especially its annual and periodic National Intelligence Estimtes (NIEs). Not surprisingly, the volume provides a wealth of information on the politics of this period – especially on the US involvement in Iran.

¹ R. Graham, Letter to R. Muir (16 and 19 November 1978), and Mr. R. Muir, Iran: Release of Confidential Records (22 December 1978), FOC 8/3216.
The book, therefore, focuses primarily on what these documents reveal about American policies in Iran during these controversial months. It will not digress either into the role of the oil crisis in the Cold War nor into the details of the August 1953 coup d’état. The former has been examined extensively elsewhere; nothing new on the subject is likely to be uncovered until Soviet archives are opened up. The coup has also been examined in detail by historians of Iran. Instead of rehashing the narrative of the coup and the Cold War, the book will focus on what new information the recent documents reveal about US policies in Iran leading to the eventual coup. In doing so, the book will keep in mind Lewis Namier’s advice that diplomatic papers should be taken with a pinch of salt and “what is unsaid or unexplained” may often be more important than what is written down.\footnote{D. Hayton, \textit{Conservative Revolutionary: The Lives of Lewis Namier} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 289.}

Transliteration requires some explanation since few agree on a standard system. The name Mossadeq is a case in point. The State Department tended to spell his name sometimes as Mossadeq, sometimes as Mossadegh, sometimes as Musaddiq, and sometimes as Mosadeq. The British Foreign Office preferred Musaddiq; the \textit{New York Times} Mossadegh; \textit{Time} Mosadeq; and the London \textit{Times} Moussadek. They were not always consistent. Throughout the book I have modified the systems developed by the Library of Congress and the International Journal of Middle East Studies. I have dispensed with diacritical marks; substituted o and e for equivalent sounds in English; used the backwards apostrophe (’) for the letter eyn, and –e rather than –i for ezafeh; and, most important, adopted spelling that has become standardized through the mainstream media – Tehran, rather than Teheran, Mashhad rather than Mashhad, Isfahan rather than Esfehan, Hussein rather than Husayn; and Khomeini rather Khomeyni. Hopefully, readers will read this preface before nit picking.

I would like to thank Alice Stoakley for editing the manuscript, as well as Maria Marsh, Daniel Brown, Natasha Whelan, Atifa Jiwa, and Raghavi Govindane for guiding it through the production process at Cambridge University Press.

\footnote{D. Hayton, \textit{Conservative Revolutionary: The Lives of Lewis Namier} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 289.}
Chronology

1951
April 27  Majles elects Mossadeq premier
April 30  National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) established
May 1    Oil Nationalization Law finalized
May 9    Allen Dulles recommends Mossadeq’s removal
May 25   UK submits case to The Hague
June 10  AIOC delegation in Tehran
June 15  Iranian flag raised over AIOC’s Khorramshahr offices
June 26  British oil technicians resign
July 14  Harriman arrives in Tehran
          Street clashes in Tehran
July 26  Harriman leaves for London
August 3–23  British delegation in Tehran
August 22  Majles gives Mossadeq vote of confidence
September 9  Bank of England restricts Iran transactions
September 21 Henderson arrives as ambassador
September 24 Mossadeq declares, “True Majles resides in the People”
September 27  UK submits case to UN Security Council
October 3  Last British oil technicians leave
October 6  Mossadeq leaves for UN
October 15–19  Mossadeq at UN
October 23  Mossadeq at White House
October 25  General Elections in UK
November 22  Mossadeq returns
November 25  Majles gives Mossadeq vote of confidence
December 5  Street clashes in Tehran

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### Chronology

#### 1952

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 18</td>
<td>Seventeenth Majles elections start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 23</td>
<td>World Bank delegation in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 21</td>
<td>British consulates closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>Ambassador Shepherd leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 11</td>
<td>World Bank delegation arrives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 14</td>
<td>Fatemi shot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>Sixteenth Majles ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>Seventeenth Majles opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>Italian tanker Rose Marie in Abadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>Henderson reports oil problem cannot be solved with Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16</td>
<td>Washington meeting to replace Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 19</td>
<td>Majles elections stopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>Henderson repeats problem cannot be solved with Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28–24 June</td>
<td>Mossadeq at The Hague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6–10</td>
<td>Henderson sees Qavam twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17</td>
<td>Italian tanker Rose Marie impounded in Aden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6</td>
<td>Majles reelects Mossadeq premier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16</td>
<td>Mossadeq resigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17</td>
<td>Majles elects Qavam premier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 20–21</td>
<td>July Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 22</td>
<td>Hague issues verdict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29</td>
<td>US asks UK for joint action to replace Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 3</td>
<td>Majles votes Mossadeq Special Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>Truman-Churchill Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 9</td>
<td>Schacht arrives in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 19</td>
<td>CIA meets with US Joints Chiefs on Iran “War-Game Plans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 16</td>
<td>Iran breaks diplomatic relations with UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23</td>
<td>Senate dissolved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 17–25</td>
<td>Bakhtiyari revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 20</td>
<td>Eisenhower-Churchill Proposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronology

February 24  CIA and MI6 meet in Cyrus
             Mossadeq threatens to resign
February 28  Protest outside Mossadeq’s residence
March 1     White House requests “more imaginative” ways
            of solving oil issue
            CIA preliminary coup plan
March 3     Negotiations with Italian and German oil
            companies
March 5     Committee of Eight formed
March 9     Mossadeq asks Henderson sum AIOC wants as
            compensation
March 21    Mossadeq addresses nation and offers “fair
            compensation”
April 5     Lack of Majles quorum to discuss report of
            Committee of Eight
April 11    Soviet-Iran negotiations start
April 15    Government organizes demonstration for
            Committee of Eight
April 16    CIA presents detailed coup plan
April 21    Committee of Eight completes report
April 22    General Afshartous kidnapped
April 23    Amini replaces Ala as court minister
April 25    Afshartous’ body found
May 3       Zahedi, Baqai, and Qonatabadi take sanctuary in
            Majles
May 5       Kashani visits Zahedi in majles
May 6       Wilber flies to Nicosia
May 10      Fist fights in majles
May 24      Government requests majles discuss report of
            Committee of Eight
June 4      More fistfights in majles
June 10     Henderson takes extended vacation
            Henderson announces that USA has exhausted
            negotiations Kermit Roosevelt arrives in Tehran
June 20     General Ashrafi appointed Tehran Military
            Governor
July 1      Moazemi elected majles president
            UK approves CIA coup plan
### Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 14</td>
<td>Government deputies announce intention to resign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government calls for referendum and new electoral law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16</td>
<td>Fifty-two deputies resign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21</td>
<td>Rallies on anniversary of July Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 25</td>
<td>Princess Ashraf returns to Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 27</td>
<td>Mossadeq addresses nation on need for referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 28</td>
<td>Foster Dulles expresses concern about Tudeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1</td>
<td>Schwarzkopf arrives in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 3</td>
<td>Referendum in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 4</td>
<td>Kashani supports dissolving majles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 5</td>
<td>Eisenhower expresses concern on Tudeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9</td>
<td>Shah-Roosevelt secret meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10</td>
<td>Allen Dulles expresses open concern on Tudeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referendum in the provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 11</td>
<td>Pan-Iranists demonstrate outside Kashani’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 13</td>
<td>Soviet delegation in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 15</td>
<td>Nasseri tries to remove Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 16</td>
<td>Shah flees to Bagdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government dissolves Seventeenth Majles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government rallies in Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 17</td>
<td>Anti-Shah demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henderson returns to Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shah in Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 18</td>
<td>Government calls for Regency Council</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henderson sees Mossadeq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Street clashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19</td>
<td>8:15 a.m. Crowd gathers in southern Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:40 Crowd moves into central Tehran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10</td>
<td>Offices of Iran Party attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Offices of Pan-Iranist Party and Third Force pillages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:35</td>
<td>Offices of <em>Shabaz and Shuresh</em> burnt down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Offices of <em>Bakhter-e Emruz</em> burnt down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Tanks in Tehran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronology

1:00 p.m. Two other publishing houses pillaged
2:30 Tanks occupy police HQ
2:45 Prisoners released
3:00 Telephone-telegraph HQ occupied
3:30 Sherman tanks begin bombarding Mossadeq’s home
5:20 Zahedi speaks on Radio Tehran
6:15 Mossadeq’s home pillaged
List of Notable Persons

Acheson, Dean. US Secretary of State.
Afshartous, General Mahmud. Chief of Police.
Akhavi, Ali. Minister of Economy.
Akhavi, Colonel Hassan. Former head of Iranian G-2.
Ala, Hussein. Minister of Court and former prime minister.
Alemi, Ibrahim. Minister of Labor.
Allen, George. US ambassador.
Amini, Abdul Qassem. Minister of Court.
Arfa, General Hassan. Former Chief of Staff.
Ashrafi, Colonel Hussein. Military Governor of Tehran.
Azar, Dr. Mehdi. Minister of Education.
Baqai, Mozaffar. Leader of Toilers Party.
Behbehani, Ayatollah Mohammad. A cleric close to the royal court.
Boroujerdi, Hussein Tabatabai. The paramount grand ayatollah.
Browne, Nicholas. Author of the British postmortem on the 1979 revolution.
Bullard, Sir Reader. British ambassador.
Butler, Rohan. Author of British postmortem on the 1951 Oil Crisis.
Daftari, General Mohammad. Commander of Custom Guards.
Dulles, Allen. CIA director.
Dulles, Foster. US Secretary of State.
Falle, Sam. British Embassy counsellor.
Faramarzi, Abdul Rahman. Majles deputy.
Farmanfarmayan, Saber. Minister of Health.
Fatemi, Hussein. Mossadeq’s deputy prime minister.
Grady, Dr. Henry. US ambassador.
Haerizadeh, Abdul Hussein. Majles deputy.
Harriman, Averell. Special US envoy to oil negotiations in Tehran.
Hassibi, Kazem. Mossadeq’s adviser on oil.
Helms, Richard. Member of CIA’s Near East Division.
List of Notable Persons

Henderson, Loy. US ambassador.
Imami, Hassan. Majles president.
Kashani, Ayatollah Abul Qassem. Cleric prominent in the nationalization campaign.
Kazemi, Baqer. Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Makki, Hussein. Prominent spokesman for the National Front.
McGhee, George. US Under Secretary of State.
Matin-Daftari, Dr. Ahmad. Senator and former prime minister.
Mir Ashrafi, Mehdi. Cashiered army officer and majles deputy.
Moazemi, Abdollah. A leader of the Iran Party.
Moazemi, Sheifollah. A leader of the Iran Party and Minister of Post and Telegraph.
Nariman, Mahmud. Mossadeq’s main adviser on financial matters.
Perron, Ernest. Shah’s friend and courtier.
Qavam, Ahmad. Veteran aristocratic politician.
Qonatabadi, Shams al-Din. Majles deputy.
Riyahi, General Mohammad Taqi. Mossadeq’s military chief of staff.
Roosevelt, Kermit. Chief of CIA’s Near East Division.
Sadeqi, Ghulam-Hussein. Minister of Interior.
Saleh, Alayar. Iran’s ambassador to the US.
Sha’a’ban Brainless (Beymogh). Prominent gang leader in Tehran.
Shayegan, Dr. Ali. Majles deputy and Mossadeq’s legal adviser.
Shepherd, Sir Francis. British ambassador.
Tayyeb, Hajj Rezai. The main gang leader in Tehran.
Waller, John. Chief of the CIA’s Iran Branch.
Wilber, Donald. Author of the CIA’s 1954 study on the coup.
Wisner, Frank. The CIA’s Deputy Director of Plans.
Zaehner, Robin. Fellow of All Souls and British Embassy counsellor.
Zahedi, General Fazlollah. Nominal head of the 1953 coup.
Zirakzadeh, Ahmad. A leader of the Iran Party.