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# (U) Mohammed Mosaddeq

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**Mohammad Mosaddeq** (19 May 1882 – 5 March 1967) was the Prime Minister of Iran<sup>[1][2]</sup> from 1951 to 1953 when he was removed from power by a *coup d'état*. From an aristocratic background, Mosaddeq was an author, administrator, lawyer, prominent parliamentarian, and statesman, famous for his passionate opposition to foreign intervention in Iran. He is most famous as the architect of the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry,<sup>[3]</sup> which had been under British control through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), (later British Petroleum or BP).

Mosaddeq was removed from power in a 19 August 1953 coup supported and funded by the British and U.S. governments and led by General Fazlollah Zahedi.<sup>[4]</sup> The operation came to be known as Operation Ajax in the United States,<sup>[5]</sup> after its CIA cryptonym, and as the 28 *Mordad* 1332 coup in Iran, after its date on the Iranian calendar.<sup>[6]</sup> Mosaddeq was imprisoned for three years and subsequently put under house arrest until his death.

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## Personal life

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Approved for Release by NSA on 09-18-2018, FOIA Case # 101214

4/3/2017

Mosaddeq was born in 1882 in Tehran to an finance minister, Mirza Hideyatu'llah Khan (d.1892) and a Qajar princess, Shahzadi Malika Taj Khanum (1858–1933). By his mother's elder sister, Mossadeq was the nephew of Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar. When his father died in 1892, he was appointed the tax collector of the Khorasan province and was bestowed with the title of *Mossadegh-os-Saltaneh* by Nasser al-Din Shah.<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1901, Mossadeq married his distant cousin, Zahra Khanum (1879–1965), a granddaughter of Nasser al-Din Shah through her mother. The couple had five children, two sons and three daughters.

## Education

Mossadeq received his Bachelor of Arts and Masters in International Law from the University of Paris (Sorbonne) before pursuing a Doctorate in Law from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in 1914 following a Bachelor of Economics in 1916. Mossadeq also taught at the University of Tehran before beginning his political career.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Early political career

Mossadeq started his career in Iranian politics with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, when at the age of 24, he was elected from Isfahan to the newly inaugurated Persian Parliament, the Majlis of Iran. In 1920, after being self-exiled to Switzerland in protest at the Anglo-Persian Treaty of 1919, he was invited by the new Persian Prime Minister, Hassan Pirnia (Moshir-ed-Dowleh), to become his Minister of Justice; but while en route to Tehran, he was asked by the people of Shiraz to become Governor of the Fars Province. He was later appointed Finance Minister, in the government of Ahmad Ghavam (Ghavam os-Saltaneh) in 1921, and then Foreign Minister in the government of Moshir-ed-Dowleh in June 1923. He then became Governor of the Azerbaijan Province. In 1923, he was re-elected to the Majlis and voted against the selection of the Prime Minister Reza Khan as the new Shah of Persia.

By 1944, Reza Shah Pahlavi had abdicated, and Mosaddeq was once again elected to parliament. This time he took the lead of *Jebhe Melli* (National Front of Iran), an organization he had founded with nineteen others, aiming to establish democracy and end the foreign presence in Iranian politics, especially by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's (AIOC) operations in Iran.

## Prime Minister

### Election as prime minister

On 28 April 1951, the Majlis named Mosaddeq as new prime minister by a vote of 79–12. Aware of Mosaddeq's rising popularity and political power, the young Shah appointed Mosaddeq to the Premiership. On 1 May, Mosaddeq nationalized the AIOC, cancelling its oil concession due to expire in 1993 and expropriating its assets. The next month a committee of five majlis deputies was sent to Khuzistan to enforce the nationalization.<sup>[9]</sup>

Mosaddeq explained his nationalization policy in a 21 June 1951 speech:

*Our long years of negotiations with foreign countries... have yielded no results this far.  
With the oil revenues we could meet our entire budget and combat poverty, disease, and*

“ *backwardness among our people. Another important consideration is that by the elimination of the power of the British company, we would also eliminate corruption and intrigue, by means of which the internal affairs of our country have been influenced. Once this tutelage has ceased, Iran will have achieved its economic and political independence. The Iranian state prefers to take over the production of petroleum itself. The company should do nothing else but return its property to the rightful owners. The nationalization law provide that 25% of the net profits on oil be set aside to meet all the legitimate claims of the company for compensation... It has been asserted abroad that Iran intends to expel the foreign oil experts from the country and then shut down oil installations. Not only is this allegation absurd; it is utter invention...*”<sup>[10]</sup> ”

The confrontation between Iran and Britain escalated from there with Mosaddeq's government refusing to allow the British any involvement in Iran's oil industry, and Britain making sure Iran could sell no oil. In July, Mossadeq broke off negotiations with AIOC after it threatened "to pull out its employees", and told owners of oil tanker ships that "receipts from the Iranian government would not be accepted on the world market." Two months later the AIOC evacuated its technicians and closed down the oil installations. Under nationalized management many refineries lacked the trained technicians that were needed to continue production. The British government announced a *de facto* blockade and reinforced its naval force in the Persian Gulf and lodged complaints against Iran before the United Nations Security Council.<sup>[9]</sup>

The British government also threatened legal action against purchasers of oil produced in the formerly British-controlled refineries and obtained an agreement with its sister international oil companies not to fill in where the AIOC was boycotting Iran. The AIOC withdrew its technicians from the refineries and the entire Iranian oil industry came to a virtual standstill, oil production dropping from 241.4 million barrels in 1950 to 10.6 million in 1952. This Abadan Crisis reduced Iran's oil income to almost nil, putting a severe strain on the implementation of Mossadeq's promised domestic reforms. At the same time BP and Aramco doubled their production in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq, to make up for lost production in Iran so that no hardship was felt in Britain. The British public rallied behind the cause of AIOC.

Still enormously popular in late 1951, Mosaddeq called elections. His base of support was in urban areas and not in the provinces.<sup>[11]</sup> This fact was reflected in the rejection of Mossadeq's bill for electoral reform (which no longer disqualified illiterates from electoral participation) by the conservative bloc, on the grounds that it would "unjustly discriminate patriots who had been voting for the last forty years".<sup>[12]</sup>

According to Ervand Abrahamian: "Realizing that the opposition would take the vast majority of the provincial seats, Mossadeq stopped the voting as soon as 79 deputies – just enough to form a parliamentary quorum — had been elected."<sup>[13]</sup> An alternative account is offered by Stephen Kinzer. Beginning in the early 1950s under the guidance of C.M. Woodhouse, chief of the British intelligence station in Tehran, Britain's covert operations network had funneled roughly £10,000 per month to the Rashidian brothers (two of Iran's most influential royalists) in the hope of buying off, according to CIA estimates, "the armed forces, the Majlis (Iranian parliament), religious leaders, the press, street gangs, politicians and other influential figures".<sup>[14]</sup> Thus, in his statement asserting electoral manipulation by "foreign agents", Mossadeq suspended the elections. His National Front party had made up 30 of the 79 deputies elected. Yet none of those present vetoed the statement, and the elections were postponed

indefinitely. The 17th Majlis convened on February 1952.

Tension soon began to escalate in Majlis. Conservative opponents refused to grant Mosaddeq special powers to deal with the economic crisis caused by the sharp drop in revenue and voiced regional grievances against the capital Tehran, while the National Front waged "a propaganda war against the landed upper class".<sup>[11]</sup>

## Resignation and uprising

On 16 July 1952, during the royal approval of his new cabinet, Mosaddeq insisted on the constitutional prerogative of the prime minister to name a Minister of War and the Chief of Staff, something the Shah had done hitherto. The Shah refused, and Mosaddeq announced his resignation appealing directly to the public for support, pronouncing that "in the present situation, the struggle started by the Iranian people cannot be brought to a victorious conclusion".<sup>[15]</sup>

Veteran politician Ahmad Qavam (also known as Ghavam os-Saltaneh) was appointed as Iran's new prime minister. On the day of his appointment, he announced his intention to resume negotiations with the British to end the oil dispute, a reversal of Mosaddeq's policy. The National Front — along with various Nationalist, Islamist, and socialist parties and groups<sup>[16]</sup> — including Tudeh — responded by calling for protests, strikes and mass demonstrations in favor of Mossadeq. Major strikes broke out in all of Iran's major towns, with the Bazaar closing down in Tehran. Over 250 demonstrators in Tehran, Hamadan, Ahvaz, Isfahan, and Kermanshah were killed or suffered serious injuries.<sup>[17]</sup>

After five days of mass demonstrations on *Siyeḥ-i Tir* (the 30th of Tir on the Iranian calendar), military commanders, ordered their troops back to barracks, fearful of overstraining the enlisted men's loyalty and left Tehran in the hands of the protesters.<sup>[18]</sup> Frightened by the unrest, Shah dismissed Qavam and re-appointed Mosaddeq, granting him the full control of the military he had previously demanded.

## Reinstatement and emergency powers

With his emergency powers, Mosaddeq tried to strengthen the democratically-elected political institutions by limiting the monarchy's unconstitutional powers,<sup>[19]</sup> cutting Shah's personal budget, forbidding him to communicate directly with foreign diplomats, transferring royal lands back to the state, expelling his politically active sister Ashraf Pahlavi.<sup>[18]</sup>

In January 1953 Mosaddeq successfully pressed Parliament to extend "emergency powers for another 12 months". With these powers, he decreed a land reform law that establishes village councils and increases in peasants shares of production.<sup>[20]</sup> This weakened the landed aristocracy, abolishing Iran's centuries-old feudal agriculture sector. Although Mosaddeq had previously been opposed to these policies when implemented unilaterally by the Shah <sup>[citation needed]</sup>, he saw it as a means of checking the power of the Tudeh Party, which had been agitating for general land reform among the peasants.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

However during this time Iranians were "becoming poorer and unhappier by the day" thanks to the British boycott. Mossadeq's political coalition began to fray, his enemies increasing in number.<sup>[21]</sup>

Partly through the efforts of Iranians working as British agents, several former members of Mossadeq's coalition turned against him. They included Muzzaffar Bazai, head of the worker-based Toilers party; Hussein Makki, who had helped lead the takeover of the Abadan refinery and was at one point considered Mossadeq's heir apparent; and most outspokenly Ayatollah Kashani, who damned Mossadeq with the



"vitriol he had once reserved for the British".<sup>[22]</sup>

## Overthrow of Mosaddeq

### Plot to depose Mosaddeq

The government of the United Kingdom had grown increasingly distressed over Mosaddeq's policies and were especially bitter over the loss of their control of the Iranian oil industry. Repeated attempts to reach a settlement had failed.

File:28mordad1332.jpg  
Soldiers surround the  
Parliament building in Tehran  
on 19 August 1953.

Despite Mosaddeq's open disgust with socialism, Winston Churchill told the United States that Mosaddeq was "increasingly turning towards communism" and was moving Iran towards the Soviet sphere at a time of high Cold War fears.<sup>[23][24][25][26]</sup>

Acting on the opposition to Mosaddeq by the British government and fears that he was, or would become, dependent on the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party at a time of expanding Soviet influence,<sup>[27]</sup> the United States and Britain began to publicly denounce Mosaddeq's policies for Iran as harmful to the country.

### Operation Ajax

In October 1952, Mosaddeq declared that Britain an enemy<sup>[citation needed]</sup>, and cut all diplomatic relations. In November and December 1952, British intelligence officials suggested to American intelligence that the prime minister should be ousted. The new US administration under Dwight D. Eisenhower and the British government under Winston Churchill agreed to work together toward Mosaddeq's removal. In March 1953, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles directed the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which was headed by his younger brother Allen Dulles, to draft plans to overthrow Mosaddeq.<sup>[28]</sup>

On 4 April 1953, CIA director Dulles approved US\$1 million to be used "in any way that would bring about the fall of Mosaddeq". Soon the CIA's Tehran station started to launch a propaganda campaign against Mosaddeq. Finally, according to *The New York Times*, in early June, American and British intelligence officials met again, this time in Beirut, and put the finishing touches on the strategy. Soon afterward, according to his later published accounts, the chief of the CIA's Near East and Africa division, Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., arrived in Tehran to direct it.<sup>[29]</sup> In 2000, *The New York Times* made partial publication of a leaked CIA document titled, *Clandestine Service History – Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq of Iran – November 1952-August 1953*. This document describes the point-by-point planning of the coup by agent Donald Wilbur, and execution conducted by the American and British governments. The New York Times published this critical document with the names censored. The New York Times also limited its publication to scanned image (bitmap) format, rather than machine-readable text. This document was eventually published properly – in text form, and fully unexpurgated. The complete CIA document is now web published.

The plot, known as Operation Ajax, centered on convincing Iran's monarch to issue a decree to dismiss Mosaddeq from office, as he had attempted some months earlier. But the Shah was terrified to attempt such a dangerously unpopular and legally questionable move, and it would take much persuasion and many U.S. funded meetings, which included bribing his sister Ashraf with a mink coat and money, to successfully change his mind.

Mosaddeq became aware of the plots against him and grew increasingly wary of conspirators acting within his government. Soon Pro-Mosaddeq supporters, who were actually paid plants of the U.S. operation, threatened Muslim leaders with "savage punishment if they opposed Mosaddeq", giving the impression that Mosaddeq was cracking down on dissent, and stirring anti-Mosaddeq sentiments within the religious community. Mosaddeq then moved to dissolve the heavily-bribed parliament, under his emergency powers. After taking the additional step of abolishing the Constitutional guarantee of a secret ballot, Mosaddeq's victory in the national plebiscite was assured. The electorate was forced into a non-secret ballot and Mosaddeq won 99.93% of the vote. The tactics employed by Mosaddeq to remain in power were dictatorial in their result, playing into the propaganda efforts of those who favoured his removal. Parliament was suspended indefinitely, and Mosaddeq's emergency powers were extended.

### Shah's exile

In August 1953, Mosaddeq attempted to convince the Shah to leave the country and allow him control over the government. The Shah finally succumbed to the CIA plot, having been finally told by Roosevelt that the U.S. would proceed with him or without him, and formally dismissed the Prime Minister in a written decree, which was in actuality a power the Shah did not legally hold according to the Iranian Constitution. Then, as a precautionary measure, he flew to Baghdad and from there hid safely in Rome, Italy. He actually signed two decrees, one dismissing Mosaddeq and the other nominating the CIA's choice, General Fazlollah Zahedi, as Prime Minister. These decrees were specifically written as dictated by Donald Wilbur the CIA architect of the plan, which were designed as a major part of Wilbur's strategy to give the impression of legitimacy to the secret coup, as can be read in the declassified plan itself which bears his name. Wilbur was later given a letter of commendation by Alan Dulles, CIA head, for his work. It is now declassified, and appears in Wilbur's autobiography.

File:Shaban jafari.jpg  
Shaban Jafari in Tehran on 19 August 1953.

### Coup d'état

Soon, massive protests were engineered by Roosevelt's team across the city, and in far-reaching areas, tribesmen were paid to be at the ready to assist the coup. Fake anti- and pro-monarchy protesters, both paid by Roosevelt (as he reports in his book, cited), violently clashed in the streets, looting and burning mosques and newspapers, leaving almost 300 dead. The pro-monarchy leadership, chosen, hidden and finally unleashed at the right moment by the CIA team, led by retired army General and former Minister of Interior in Mosaddeq's cabinet, Fazlollah Zahedi joined with underworld figures such as the Rashidian brothers and local strongman Shaban Jafari,<sup>[30]</sup> to gain the upper hand on 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad). The military joined on cue: pro-Shah tank regiments stormed the capital and bombarded the prime minister's official residence, on Roosevelt's cue, according to his book. Mosaddeq managed to flee from the mob that set in to ransack his house, and, the following day, surrendered to General Zahedi, who was meanwhile set up by the CIA with makeshift headquarters at the Officers' Club. Mosaddeq was arrested at the Officers' Club and transferred to a military jail shortly after.

### Shah's return

Shortly after the return of the Shah, on 22 August 1953, from his flight to Rome, Mosaddeq was tried by a military tribunal for high treason. Zahedi and the Shah were inclined, however, to spare the man's life (the death penalty would have applied according to the laws of the day). Mosaddeq received a sentence of

3 years in solitary confinement at a military jail and was exiled to his village not far from Tehran, where he remained under house arrest on his estate until his death, on 5 March 1967.<sup>[31]</sup>

Zahedi's new government soon reached an agreement with foreign oil companies to form a consortium and "restore the flow of Iranian oil to world markets in substantial quantities", giving the U.S. and Great Britain the lion's share of Iran's oil. In return, the U.S. massively funded the Shah's resulting dictatorship, including his army and brutal secret police force, SAVAK, known widely for its torture, until the Shah's overthrow in 1979.<sup>[32]</sup>

## Legacy

### Iran

The secret U.S. overthrow of Mossadeq served as a rallying point in anti-US protests during the 1979 Iranian revolution and to this day he is said to be one of the most popular figures in Iranian history.<sup>[33]</sup>

### U.S. and other countries

The extent of the US role in Mossadeq's overthrow was not formally acknowledged for many years, although the Eisenhower administration was quite vocal in its opposition to the policies of the ousted Iranian Prime Minister. In his memoirs, Eisenhower writes angrily about Mossadeq, and describes him as impractical and naive, though he stops short of admitting any overt involvement in the coup.

Eventually the CIA's role became well-known, and caused controversy within the organization itself, and within the CIA congressional hearings of the 1970s. CIA supporters maintain that the plot against Mosaddeq was strategically necessary, and praise the efficiency of agents in carrying out the plan. Critics say the scheme was paranoid and colonial, illegal, as well as immoral.

In March 2000, then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated her regret that Mosaddeq was ousted: "The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons. But the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development and it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America." In the same year, the *New York Times* published a detailed report about the coup based on declassified CIA documents.<sup>[4]</sup>

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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY  
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FOIA Case: 101214A  
18 September 2018

JOHN GREENEWALD  
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Dear Mr. Greenewald:

This responds to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request of 28 March 2017 for Intellipedia records on Operation Ajax. As stated in our initial response to you, dated 3 April 2017, your request was assigned Case Number 101214. For purposes of this request and based on the information you provided in your letter, you are considered an "all other" requester. As such, you are allowed 2 hours of search and the duplication of 100 pages at no cost. There are no assessable fees for this request. Your request has been processed under the provisions of the FOIA.

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We conducted a search across the three levels of Intellipedia and located documents that are responsive to your request. The documents are enclosed. Certain information, however, has been deleted from the documents.

This Agency is authorized by statute to protect certain information concerning its activities, in this case, internal URLs. Such information is exempt from disclosure pursuant to the third exemption of the FOIA, which provides for the withholding of information specifically protected from disclosure by statute. The specific statute applicable in this case is Section 6, Public Law 86-36 (50 U.S. Code 3605). We have determined that such information exists in this record, and we have excised it accordingly.

In addition, personal information regarding individuals has been deleted from the enclosure in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552 (b)(6). This exemption protects from disclosure information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of

personal privacy. In balancing the public interest for the information you requested against the privacy interests involved, we have determined that the privacy interests sufficiently satisfy the requirements for the application of the (b)(6) exemption.

Since these deletions may be construed as a partial denial of your request, you are hereby advised of this Agency's appeal procedures. If you decide to appeal, you should do so in the manner outlined below.

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The facsimile number is (443)479-3612; the email address to submit an appeal is FOIARSC@nsa.gov.

- It must be postmarked or delivered electronically no later than 90 calendar days from the date of this letter. Decisions appealed after 90 days will not be addressed.
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