

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

## The Intriguing CIA-inspired 1953 Coup that Made Iran and America Enemies

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RECENTLY, *The New York Times* published a report on the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) role in the CIA-engineered coup that overthrew the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and installed Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1953. This was the first successful overthrow of a foreign government by the CIA, soon to be followed by the agency's successful coup in Guatemala and the ill-fated attempt, also known as the Bay of Pigs invasion, to overthrow Cuba's Fidel Castro in 1961. Mossadegh's overthrow set the stage for the Islamic revolution twenty-six years later in 1979, and was responsible for the half a century of anti-American hatred in one of the most powerful nations in the Middle East.

Interestingly, it was the British intelligence that initiated the planning of the coup. London and Washington shared a common interest in maintaining the West's control over the Iranian oil. According to the CIA document obtained by *The New York Times*, the success of the coup was a matter of chance, and that the "agency had almost complete contempt for the man it was empowering, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, whom it derided as a vacillating coward. And it recounts for the first time, the agency's tortured efforts to seduce and cajole the Shah into taking part in his own coup."

Code-named TP-Ajax, the "officers orchestrating the coup worked directly with the royalist Iranian military officers, handpicked the prime minister's replacement, sent a stream of envoys to bolster the Shah's courage, directed a campaign of bombing by Iranians posing as the members of the Communist Party, and plotted articles and editorial cartoons in newspapers." On the night of the coup, however, almost nothing went according to the meticulously crafted script. The CIA operatives were about to flee the country "when several Iranian officers recruited by the agency, acting on their own, took command of a pro-Shah demonstration in Tehran and seized the government."

Although Britain initiated the plot in 1952, Princeton graduate, Dr. Donald N. Wilbur, an expert on Middle Eastern architecture, was its chief architect. American President Harry Truman's administration rejected the plot, but President Dwight Eisenhower approved it shortly after taking office in 1953, because of fears of losing Iranian oil, and of communism. Dr. Wilbur reserves his most scathing scorn for the agency's Iranian allies, referring to "the recognized incapacity of Iranians to plan or act in a thoroughly logical manner."

The coup had its origin in a British showdown with Iran, restive under decades of near-colonial British domination. The prize was Iran's oil fields. Britain occupied Iran during World War II to protect a supply route to its ally, the Soviet Union and to prevent the oil from falling into the hands of the Nazis. It ousted the Shah's father whom it regarded as unmanageable, and replaced him with his young son. Britain retained control over the Iranian oil after the war through Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In 1951, Iran's Parliament voted to nationalize the oil industry, and the legislators backing the law elected its leading advocate, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, as prime minister, with the blessing of the Shah.

Britain responded with threats, sanctions and a worldwide boycott of Iranian oil. Dr. Mossadegh, a European-educated lawyer, then in his early 70s, prone to tears and outbursts, refused to back down. In meetings in November and December 1952, British intelligence officials started their American counterparts with a plan for joint operation to oust the restless prime minister.

The Americans, who had not intended to discuss this question at all, agreed to study it. It had attractions. Anti-commu-

nism had risen to a fever pitch in Washington, and officials were worried that Iran might fall under the sway of the Soviet Union, a historical presence there. In March 1953, an unexpected development pushed the plot forward: an Iranian general approached the American Embassy about supporting an army-led coup. The newly inaugurated Eisenhower administration was intrigued. The coalition that elected Dr. Mossadegh was splintering, and the Iranian Communist Party, the Tudeh, had become active. Allen W. Dulles, the director of the CIA, approved one million dollars on April 4 to be used "in any way that would bring about the fall of Mossadegh." "The aim was to bring to power a government which would reach an equitable oil settlement, enabling Iran to become economically sound and financially solvent, and which would vigorously prosecute the dangerously strong Communist Party."

Within days the agency identified Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi as the man to spearhead a coup. The plan called for the Shah to play a major role. "A Shah-General Zahedi combination, supported by CIA local assets and financial backing, would have a good chance of overthrowing Mossadegh, particularly if this combination should be able to get the largest mobs in the streets and if a sizeable portion of the Tehran garrison refused to carry out Mossadegh's orders," the report said.

The planners continued to have doubts about the Shah, whose family had seized the throne just 32 years earlier, when his powerful father led a coup of his own. But the young Shah, the agency officials wrote, was "by nature a creature of indecision, beset by formless doubts and fears, often at odds with his family, including Princess Ashraf, his forceful and scheming twin sister."

The Shah also suffered from what the CIA called a "pathological fear" of British intrigues; a potential obstacle to a joint operation. In May 1953 the agency sent Dr. Wilbur to Cyprus to meet Norman Darbyshire, chief of the Iran branch of British intelligence, to make plans for the coup. Mollification of the Shah's fears was high on the agenda. It was decided to persuade the Shah that the United States and Britain "consider the oil question secondary." The British said that they had recruited two brothers named Rashidian. The Americans, the report disclosed, did not trust the British and lied about the identity of their best "assets" inside Iran.

The CIA was unsure whether the Cyprus plan would work. The Tehran station warned the headquarters that "the Shah would not act decisively against Mossadegh," and adding that Gen. Zahedi "appeared lacking in drive, energy and concrete plans." Despite doubts, the Tehran station began disseminating "gray propaganda" passing out anti-Mossadegh cartoons in the streets and planting unflattering articles in the local press.

In early June, American and British officers met again, this time in Beirut and put finishing touches to the plot. Soon afterwards, the chief of the CIA's Near East and Africa division, Kermit Roosevelt, the grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, arrived in Tehran to direct the operation. The plan called for the Shah to stand fast as the CIA stirred up popular unrest, and then as the country lurched towards chaos, to issue royal decrees dismissing Dr. Mossadegh and appointing General Zahedi prime minister. The agency sought to "produce such pressure on the Shah that it would be easier for him to sign the papers required of him than it would be to refuse." They turned to his sister for help.

On July 11, as President Eisenhower signed off on the plan, the CIA and the British agents approached Princess Ashraf, the French Riviera and persuaded her to return to Iran and tell her brother to follow the script. The return of the unpopular princess unleashed a storm of protest from pro-Mossadegh forces. The Shah, too, was furious because she had come back without

his permission, and at first refused to see her. But a palace staff member — another British agent — gained Ashraf access on July 29. A few years ago, the writer read Princess Ashraf's autobiography where she painted a slightly different picture. She clothed her account in patriotic garb and recounted with terror how she saved CIA's letter to the Shah from the thorough body search at the Tehran airport. According to Princess Ashraf's account, she was staying in a mansion next to the royal palace and at the appointed time handed over the CIA's letter to the Shah over the wall that separated the two compounds.

The CIA informed the Shah that they had enlisted Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the father of the Gulf War commander, for the coup campaign. Gen. Schwarzkopf had befriended the Shah a decade earlier while leading the United States military mission to Iran. The British, too, sought to assure the Shah that their agents spoke for London. A British agent, Asadollah Rashidian, approached the Shah in late July and invited him to select a phrase that would then be broadcast at prearranged times on BBC's Persian language programme — as proof that Mr. Rashidian spoke for the British.

The exercise did not seem to have much effect on the Shah. The Shah told Mr. Rashidian on July 30 and 31 that he had heard the broadcast, but "requested time to assess the situation." In early August, the CIA stepped up the pressure. Iranian operatives pretending to be communists threatened Muslim leaders with "savagery" if they opposed Mossadegh, "seeking to stir anti-communist sentiment in the religious community. The house of at least one prominent Muslim was bombed by the CIA agents posing as communists. The report does not say whether anyone was hurt in the attack. To intensify propaganda campaign, a leading newspaper owner was granted \$45,000 "in the belief that this would make his organ amenable to our purposes." But the Shah remained adamant. In an August 1 meeting with Gen. Schwarzkopf, he refused to sign the CIA-written decrees (tiring Mossadegh and appointing Gen. Zahedi). The Shah said he doubted that the army would support him in a showdown with Mossadegh.

During the meeting, the report says, the Shah was so convinced that the palace was bugged that he "led the general into the grand ball room, pulled a small table to its exact centre and got onto it to talk, insisting that the general do the same." This meeting was to be followed by a series of additional ones, some between Roosevelt and the Shah and some between Rashidian and the Shah, in which relentless pressure was exerted in frustrating attempts to overcome an entrenched attitude of vacillation and indecision," the report said.

By now Dr. Mossadegh had figured out that there was a plot against him. He moved to consolidate his power by calling for a national referendum to dissolve the parliament. The rigged August 4 referendum, in which the prime minister won 99.9 per cent of the vote, only helped the plotters, providing an issue on which Mossadegh could be relentlessly attacked. "But the Shah still would not move against Mossadegh." On Aug. 3 Roosevelt had a long and inconclusive session with the Shah, who (the Shah) stated that he was not an adventurer and hence could not take the chances of one. "Roosevelt pointed out that there was no other way by which the government could be changed and the test was now between Mossadegh and his force and the Shah and the army, which was still with him, but which would soon slip away." Mr. Roosevelt told the Shah "that failure to act could lead only to a communist Iran or to a second Korea."

Still haunted by doubts, the Shah asked Mr. Roosevelt if President Eisenhower could tell him what to do. By a complete coincidence and a great

good fortune, the President, while addressing a governor's conference in Seattle on 4 August, deviated from his script to state by implication that the United States would not sit idly and see Iran fall behind the Iron Curtain. By Aug. 10 the Shah had finally agreed to see Gen. Zahedi and a few army officers involved in the plot, but still refused to sign the decrees. The CIA sent Mr. Rashidian to tell the Shah that Mr. Roosevelt "would leave in complete disgust unless the Shah took action within a few days." The Shah finally signed the decrees on Aug. 13. Word that he would support an army-led coup spread rapidly among the army officers backing Gen. Zahedi.

The coup began on the night of August 15 and was immediately compromised by a talkative Iranian army officer whose remarks were relayed to Dr. Mossadegh. "The operation might still have succeeded had not most of the participants proved to be inept or lacking in decision at the critical juncture." Dr. Mossadegh's chief of staff, Gen. Taghi Rahi, learned of the plot hours before it was to begin and sent his deputy to the barracks of the Imperial Guard. The deputy was arrested there, just

as the project was not quite dead. Meanwhile, Dr. Mossadegh had overreached, playing into the CIA's hands by dissolving the parliament after the coup. On the morning of August 17, the Shah finally announced from Baghdad that he had signed the decrees—though by now he had delayed so long that the plotters feared it was too late.

At this critical juncture, Dr. Mossadegh let down his guard. Lulled by the Shah's departure and the arrest of some officers involved in the coup, the government recalled most of the troops it had deployed around the city, believing that the danger had passed. That night, the CIA arranged for General Zahedi and other key Iranian agents and army officers to be smuggled into the American Embassy compound "in the bottom of cars and in closed jeeps" for a "council of war." They agreed to start a counterattack on Aug. 19, sending a leading cleric from Tehran to the holy city of Qum to try to orchestrate a call for a holy war against communism. (The religious forces they were attempting to manipulate would years later call the United States "The Great Satan.") Using travel papers forged by the CIA, key army officers went to

to quit, the mood on the streets of Tehran shifted. On the morning of Aug. 19, several Tehran newspapers published the Shah's long-awaited decrees, and soon pro-Shah crowds were building in the streets. "They only needed leadership," the report said. And Iranian agents of the CIA provided it. Without specific orders, a journalist who was one of the agency's most important Iranian agents led a crowd toward Parliament, inciting people to set fire to the offices of a newspaper owned by Dr. Mossadegh's foreign minister. Another Iranian agent of the CIA led a crowd to sack the offices of pro-Tudeh papers. "The news that something quite startling was happening spread at great speed throughout the city," he report added.

The CIA tried to exploit the situation, sending urgent messages that the Rashidian brothers and two key American agents should "swing the security forces to the side of the demonstrators." But things were now moving far too quickly for the agency to manipulate. An Iranian army colonel who had been involved in the plot several days earlier suddenly appeared outside the parliament with a tank, while members of the now disbanded Imperial Guard seized trucks and drove through the streets.

the nation. Dr. Mossadegh and other government officials were rounded up, while officers supporting Gen. Zahedi placed "known supporters of TP-Ajax" in command of all units of the Tehran garrison.

The Soviet Union was caught completely off guard. Even as Mossadegh government was falling, Moscow radio was broadcasting a story on the failure of the American adventure in Iran. "But the fact is, the CIA headquarters was as surprised as Moscow. When news of the coup's success arrived, it 'seemed to be a bad joke, in view of the depression that still hung on from the day before,' said the report. Throughout the day, Washington got most of its information from news agencies, receiving only two cablegrams from the station. Mr. Roosevelt later explained that if he had told headquarters what was going on, "London and Washington would have thought they were crazy and told them to stop immediately," the report stated.

Still, the CIA took full credit inside the government. The following year it overthrew the government of Guatemala, and a myth developed that the agency could topple governments anywhere in the world. Iran proved that third world king-making could be deadly. "It was a day that should never have ended," the CIA's secret history said, describing August 19, 1953. "For it carried with it such a sense of excitement, of satisfaction and of jubilation that it is doubtful whether any other can come up to it."

The wisdom of the CIA's overthrow of Mossadegh and the reinstatement of the Shah has to be questioned. Sure the West made sure of its access to Iranian oil, and stopped the spread of communism in Iran. It is doubtful, however, that Iran would have gone communist. Mossadegh was an ultranationalist, not a communist; although he had the support of the communists, Mossadegh did not promote their interest. Ironically, the communists turned away from Mossadegh at the end because they considered him too close to the United States!

By engineering Mossadegh's overthrow, America became identified with the Shah's repressive regime, and earned Iran's undying enmity. In 1963-64, the Shah exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a religious leader, to Turkey for criticising the Shah's close relationship with the United States. Dr. Mossadegh died in 1967 and has become a cult figure in Iran. As turmoil swept Iran in 1978, Khomeini, then in Paris, established an opposition movement. In 1979 the Iranian Revolution forced the Shah out of Iran. Khomeini returned triumphantly to proclaim the Islamic Republic of Iran. A month later, upon

the recommendation of Henry Kissinger, the Shah was allowed to enter the United States for cancer treatment in New York. Angered by Shah's entry into the US, Iranian students occupied the American Embassy in Tehran, and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. America froze Iranian assets.

In 1980, the US broke diplomatic relations with Iran, expelled Iranian diplomats and banned American exports to the country. In April 1980, a secret American mission to rescue the hostages was aborted because of bad weather. Eight servicemen died in a helicopter crash. The same year, the Shah died in Egypt, at the age of 60. The hostage crisis cost President Carter his reelection. There are reports that to prevent an "October surprise" [the Presidential election was held in early November, 1980] candidate Reagan's people prevailed upon the Khomeini's people not to release the hostages until after the election. The hostages were released minutes after President Carter's term ended in January 1981.

In 1986 it was revealed that the Reagan administration had attempted to exchange arms to elicit Iranian assistance for the release of American hostages held in Lebanon. Khomeini died in 1989. In 1993, the Clinton administration began a campaign to isolate Iran, cutting off all trade and investment with Iran in 1995, and in 1996 threatening sanctions against foreign companies investing in Iran. In 1997, moderate cleric Mohammad Khatami was elected President of Iran, who proposed cultural exchanges with the US, but ruled out government to government talks. In 1999 the Clinton administration announced that it would let American companies sell food and medical items to Iran. Reminiscent of America's "ping pong diplomacy" with China in 1971, America and Iran engaged in "wrestling diplomacy" when wrestlers from the two nations visited each other. Earlier this year, America decided to allow the import of certain Iranian luxury items, such as pistachio and caviar, into the United States.

For the first time, in March of this year, a top official of the United States government, Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, acknowledged the 1953 CIA-inspired coup's pivotal role in the troubled relationship between Iran and America, and came closer to apologising than any other top American official had before. "The Eisenhower administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons," Madam Secretary of State said, adding, "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 their internal affairs."

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outlying army garrisons to persuade commanders to join the coup.

Once again, the Shah disappointed the CIA. He left Baghdad for Rome the next day, apparently to begin the life of an exile. Newspapers supporting Dr. Mossadegh reported on the demise of the Pahlavi dynasty, and a statement from the Communist Party's central committee attributed the coup to "Anglo-American intrigue." Demonstrators ripped down imperial statues—as they would 26 years later during the Islamic revolution. The CIA station cabled headquarters for advice on whether to "continue with TP-Ajax or withdraw." Headquarters spent a day feasted by depression and despair," the report said, adding "The message sent to Tehran on the night of Aug. 18 said that 'the operation has been tried and failed,' and that 'in the absence of strong recommendations to the contrary, operations against Mossadegh should be discontinued.'"

Just as the Americans were ready to quit, the mood on the streets of Tehran shifted. On the morning of Aug. 19, several Tehran newspapers published the Shah's long-awaited decrees, and soon pro-Shah crowds were building in the streets. "They only needed leadership," the report said. And Iranian agents of the CIA provided it. Without specific orders, a journalist who was one of the agency's most important Iranian agents led a crowd toward Parliament, inciting people to set fire to the offices of a newspaper owned by Dr. Mossadegh's foreign minister. Another Iranian agent of the CIA led a crowd to sack the offices of pro-Tudeh papers. "The news that something quite startling was happening spread at great speed throughout the city," he report added.

The CIA station in Tehran sent a message to *The Associated Press* in New York, asserting that "unofficial reports are current to the effect that the leaders of the plot are armed with two decrees of the Shah, one dismissing Mossadegh and the other appointing Gen. Zahedi to replace him." The CIA and its agents also arranged for the decrees to be mentioned in some Tehran papers. The propaganda initiative quickly bogged down. Many of the CIA's Iranian agents were under arrest or on the run. That afternoon, agency operatives prepared a statement from Gen. Zahedi that they hoped to distribute publicly. But they could not find a printing press that was not being watched by forces loyal to the prime minister. On Aug. 16, prospects of reviving the operation were dealt a seemingly fatal blow when it was learnt that the Shah had bolted to Baghdad. CIA headquarters cabled Tehran urging Mr. Roosevelt, the station chief, to leave immediately.

Mr. Roosevelt refused to leave, insisting that there was still "a slight remaining chance of success," if the Shah would broadcast an address over Baghdad radio and Gen. Zahedi took an aggressive stand. The first sign that the tide might turn came with reports that Iranian soldiers had broken up Tudeh or Communist groups, beating them and making them chant their support for the Shah. "The station continued to feel



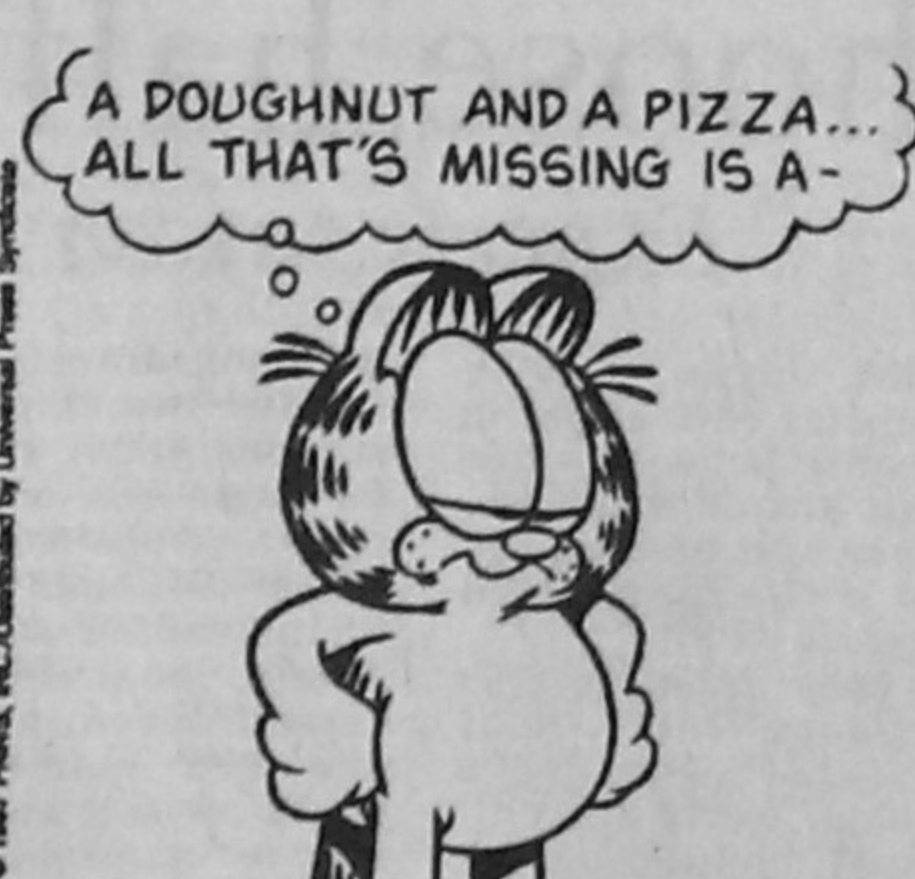
## Garfield ©



## James Bond

BY IAN FLEMING  
DRAWING BY NORMAN

## by Jim Davis



## by Jim Davis



SMC-এর  
ওয়েবসাইট



সবসময় কয়েক প্যাকেট

ওয়েবসাইট ঘরে রাখুন

...নিশ্চিন্তে থাকুন।