

Regime Change 1952-53

Donald N. Wilber

This Clandestine Service History of Operation Ajax to overthrow the Prime Minister of Iran was written for the US Central Intelligence Agency in March 1954 by Dr. Donald N. Wilber, who played an active role in the operation. Although the CIA records it as published in 1969, the History entered the public domain only in April 2000 when The New York Times published on the web the main body of the text. This was done after removing certain names and identifying descriptions. These excisions are denoted in these excerpts by [square brackets].

Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq was Prime Minister of Iran for just over two years, from April 1951 to August 1953, when he was removed from power in a complex plot prepared by the British and US intelligence agencies.

The Iranian Parliament, the Majlis, had named Mossadeq as new Prime Minister by a vote of 79-12. Aware of Mossadeq's rising popularity and political power, the young Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, gave assent to the Parliament's vote. Shortly after coming to office, Mossadeq enforced the Oil Nationalisation Act, which involved the expropriation of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company's assets.

In response, the British Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, announced that the Mossadeq government would not be allowed to export any oil produced in the formerly British-controlled refineries at Abadan. A blockade of British ships was established in the Persian Gulf. Since Britain had long been Iran's primary oil-consumer, the stalemate was hard on Iran. But, despite the economic hardships of his nationalisation plan, Mossadeq remained popular and, in 1952, was approved by Parliament for a second term.

In October 1952, Mossadeq declared that Britain was 'an enemy,' and cut all diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. In November and December of that year, British intelligence officials suggested to American intelligence that he should be ousted. The new US administration under Dwight Eisenhower and the new British government under Winston Churchill agreed to work together toward Mossadeq's removal. In April 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) approved a budget of \$1,000,000 which could be used 'in any way by the Tehran Station to bring about the fall of Mossadeq'.

* * *

Drafting the plan

Near the end of April 1953 Dr. Donald N. Wilber, covert consultant to Near East and Africa Division, was selected by the Division to

go to Nicosia and, in close collaboration with SIS (the British Secret Intelligence Service), draw up a plan for the overthrow of Mossadeq... It also quickly became apparent that the SIS was perfectly content to follow whatever lead was taken by the Agency. It seemed obvious to Wilber that the British were very pleased at having obtained the active cooperation of the Agency and were determined to do nothing which might jeopardize US participation ...

Discussions at Nicosia moved on to a disclosure of assets by both parties. Those by SIS were centered upon the contacts of the Rashidian brothers in such fields as the armed forces, the Majlis (Iranian Parliament), religious leaders, the press, street gangs, politicians, and other influential figures. When this material was relayed from Nicosia, the Tehran Station commented that it was their belief that these assets had been far overstated and oversold. In reply it was pointed out that SIS was as aware as we of the weaknesses of the Rashidians, but that one of the strongest points in their favor was their avowed willingness to risk their possessions and their lives in an attempt against Mossadeq. In the critical days of August 1953 the Rashidians did display such a willingness. SIS disclosures were followed by those of Dr. Wilber for CIA. Prior to Wilber's departure a discussion was held at Headquarters to determine which of the station assets should be disclosed to the SIS in return for promised disclosures by the SIS of the assets which they were prepared to put into an operational plan. It was agreed at Headquarters that the identities of the vitally important principal agents of the Tehran Station [] would not be disclosed. Since the SIS had been informed during the November 1952 that CIA had two major principal agents in Iran, it was necessary to offer two such in place of []. This was done, naming a station agent and a sub-agent of [] to these important posts. To the best of our knowledge [] were not uncovered by the Rashidian brothers or any other SIS agents during the course of this operation...

Discussions now narrowed down to a series of basic assumptions which were stressed both in the draft plan and in its final form. It was determined that the details of the operational plan should be included within a framework of such basic assumptions as these: that Zahedi alone of potential candidates had the vigor and courage to make him worthy of support; that the Shah must be brought into the operation; that the Shah would act only with great reluctance but that he could be forced to do so; that if the issue was clear-cut the armed forces would follow the Shah rather than Mossadeq; that the operation must, if possible, be made to appear legal or quasi-legal instead of an outright coup; that public opinion must be fanned to fever pitch against Mossadeq in the period just preceding the execution of the overthrow operation; that the military aspect would be successful only if the station were able to review the plan with the Iranians chosen by Zahedi to execute it; that immediate precautions must be taken by the new government to meet a strong reaction by the Tudeh Party. Some of these assumptions were presented in cables sent off before the draft plan was completed. The reactions from the Tehran Station and Headquarters did not always express agreement with the ideas of the planners... It was, however, agreed that the station should begin at

once with its new policy of attacking the government of Mossadeq through grey propaganda. The station relayed this line to its own agents and passed it on to the Rashidian brothers of SIS. The CIA Art Group... was asked to prepare a considerable number of anti-Mossadeq cartoons...

Once the draft plan had been cabled, it was agreed with SIS that their copy would be hand-carried to London where the viewpoint of the SIS headquarters would be incorporated prior to 15 June. In the meantime, as had been agreed with Headquarters, the Agency would conduct a searching scrutiny of the plan at Beirut, and then bring these results to London for amalgamation with the draft as reworked by SIS at London. Carroll (CIA officer, Tehran) remained a few days after the completion of the draft to begin work on the military aspect of the plan. He also returned to Nicosia for a few additional days after the close of the Beirut meetings for this purpose...

Consolidating the operational plan

On the afternoon of 9 June all those who were to take part in the discussions arrived in Beirut: Mr. Kermit Roosevelt, Chief, Near East and Africa Division, and project chief throughout the operation, came in by plane from London; Carroll came from Cyprus by plane; Roger Goiran, Chief of Station at Tehran, drove on from Damascus by car; and Wilber came in from Cairo by air.

On the morning of 10 June the talks got underway and continued for four days ... Roosevelt and Wilber arrived in London on 15 June and reported to the main offices of the SIS at 54 Broadway ... The London meetings were held in one of the conference rooms at 54 Broadway, notable only for a large sign with the legend in red, 'Curb Your Guests.' ...

From the moment the discussion began, it was clear that the SIS had no major comments of their own on the draft plan. Nor did they have much to say on the Beirut version beyond a certain close attention to phraseology. As at Nicosia it was apparent that the Americans were to be placated and allowed to run things as they pleased. They did, however, seem to have abundant confidence in the plan and in the successful outcome of the operation, and said that the Rashidians would be ordered to follow completely the orders of CIA's Tehran Station.

At the final meeting those present reviewed the future conduct of affairs. The SIS officers stated that they thought it would take some time to obtain a firm decision from their government as to the approval or non-approval of the plan.

Roosevelt and Wilber left London on 17 June, and Roosevelt was back in his office by noon of the 18th. There the plan was immediately reconstructed and typed up...

The decisions are made – activity begins

Since the meetings at Beirut and London had taken such a relatively short time, there was not too much that Headquarters could do in the interval from the time of Roosevelt's departure until his return. Progress had, however, been made in setting up a specific and close liaison with the State Department. The fact that an operational plan was being prepared was already known to a very restricted

number of individuals in the State Department, and it should be noted that the security there seems to have been excellent up to the time of the event.

The Greece-Turkey-Iran (GTI) office of the Department of State presented its informed opinion in two papers: one was a top secret paper of 6 June 1953 entitled, 'Proposal to Bring about a Change of Government in Iran' and the other a top secret undated GTI memorandum on the subject, 'Measures which the United States Government might take in support of a successor government to Mossadeq.'

It was not the task of officers of the State Department to obtain high level decisions on the plan. However, the State Department did assert that, prior to acceptance of the plan, assurance must be forthcoming from the British that they would be flexible in their approach to the government that succeeded Mossadeq as far as the oil question was concerned.

Mr. Leslie Herbert Mitchell, UK Embassy officer (SIS representative) charged with liaison with the Agency, concerned himself with this point and did expedite the required assurances from the British Government. These assurances took the form of a foreign office memorandum presented by British Ambassador to the United States, Roger Mellor Makins, to Under Secretary of State Smith on 23 July 1953... Also the Department of State wanted to satisfy itself that an adequate amount of interim economic aid would be forthcoming to the successor government before it would finally approve decisive action.

During this same period discussions between Agency officers and Ambassador Henderson (in Washington, having arrived on consultation 3 June) began 8 June ... The Ambassador appeared to backtrack somewhat from his earlier opinion that the premise of the plan that the Shah would cooperate was fallacious, and that the Shah would not issue a firman naming Zahedi unless in response to a vote of inclination by the Majlis. The Ambassador, who was always thoroughly cooperative, was absorbed in a search for constructive suggestions and willingly agreed to delay his return to Tehran by arranging a prolonged visit in Europe. From the standpoint of the plan it was not considered advisable to have the Ambassador in Tehran when the final operation was undertaken. In addition, his continued absence was thought to be an important factor in the war of nerves which was to be conducted against Mossadeq.

The following approvals of the operational plan were obtained on the dates indicated:

Director CIA	–	11 July 1953
Director SIS	–	1 July 1953
Foreign Secretary	–	1 July 1953
Secretary of State	–	11 July 1953
Prime Minister	–	1 July 1953
President	–	11 July 1953

Pending final approval or disapproval of the operational plan, the station was carrying forward activities already authorized toward the achievement of the goal. In addition to the general authorization of April enabling the Tehran Station to

spend up to \$1,000,000 in covert activity in support of Zahedi, the station on 20 May was specifically authorized to spend one million rials a week (rate of 90 rials to the US dollar) in purchasing the cooperation of members of the Iranian Majlis.

On or about the end of June the station had established direct contact with the Rashidian brothers and was prepared to instruct them as their role and those of their contacts in the development of the operation...

Carroll left for Tehran in mid-July. He stopped over at London to discuss his military plan with SIS Officer Norman Darbyshire and finally reached Tehran on 21 July. Wilber's group sent guidance cables and dispatches to the station, all intended to flesh up the skeleton of psychological operations as presented in the plan itself. In the meantime a considerable number of anti-Mossadeq articles were written or outlined by the group while the CIA Art Group was given constant guidance in its preparation of a large number of anti-Mossadeq cartoons and broadsheets. In addition, these artists did an effective drawing for a wall poster showing Zahedi being presented to the Iranian people by the Shah. Written and illustrative material piled up rapidly, and on 19 July a special courier took it all to Tehran. On 22 July the station began to distribute the material to several agents...

Mounting pressure against the Shah

From the very beginning it had been recognized that the Shah must be forced to play a specific role, however reluctant he might prove to be. Therefore, the plan presented a series of measures designed to rid him once and for all of his pathological fear of the 'hidden hand' of the British, and to assure him that the United States and the United Kingdom would firmly support him and had both resolved that Mossadeq must go. The measures were also intended 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...

The initial task was to brief Princess Ashraf, who was thought to be in Paris at that time... she had shown no enthusiasm at all with regard to her proposed role. However, the next day the 'official' representatives had two meetings with her and she agreed to do everything that was asked of her. She did say that her arrival would arouse a strong reaction from the pro-Mossadeq press and hoped that we would be able to put out effective counterblasts...

Ashraf reached Tehran as a passenger on a commercial flight on 25 July. As expected, her unauthorized return did create a real storm. Neither the Shah, himself, nor the government of Mossadeq had been asked to permit her to return. Both were furious. The Shah refused to see her but did accept a letter passed on through the medium of [], head of the Shah's household, who was loyal and devoted in an effective way throughout this period. This letter contained news that US General Schwarzkopf was coming to see the Shah on an errand similar to that of Ashraf, herself. The Shah welcomed this news and received his sister on the evening of 29 July. The session opened stormily but ended on a note of reconciliation. On the next day she took a plane back to Europe...

The second emissary arrived on the scene in the person of Asadollah Rashidian,

the principal SIS agent. According to the plan, Asadollah Rashidian's initial task with the Shah was to convince the ruler that Rashidian was the official spokesman of the UK Government. The advance plan, that of having the Shah select a key phrase which would then be broadcast on the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Persian language program on certain dates, was followed. In London the necessary arrangements had been made by Darbyshire to send the phrase over the BBC. On 30 July and again on the 31st the Shah saw Asadollah Rashidian. He had heard the broadcast, but he requested time to assess the situation. Asadollah was, however, able to prepare the Shah for the visit of the American emissary, General Schwarzkopf, and to stress the point that this emissary would repeat the message and, hence, give an additional guarantee of the close collaboration between the United Kingdom and the United States in this undertaking.

Schwarzkopf had been chosen by the drafters of the operational plan because of the fact that he had enjoyed the friendship and respect of the Shah in the period from 1942 until 1948 when he headed the US Military Mission to the Iranian Gendarmerie. Approached on 26 June 1953 by John Waller, Chief, Near East and Africa/4, briefed at Headquarters on 19 July, Schwarzkopf took to his mission with relish. He said that he had a reputation with the Shah for telling him unpleasant truths that others withheld from him, and he stated that he was sure he could get the required cooperation from the Shah. Schwarzkopf was given a cover mission consisting of a short tour to Lebanon, Pakistan, and Egypt so that his visit to Tehran would appear as a brief stop en route to a principal destination. Schwarzkopf left by air for Beirut on 21 July.

Schwarzkopf's mission was to obtain from the Shah the three papers... They were: (1) a firman naming Zahedi as Chief of Staff, (2) a letter indicating his faith in Zahedi which the latter could employ to recruit army officers for the plan in the name of the Shah, and (3) a firman calling on all ranks of the army to support his legal Chief of Staff. It was felt that it would be easier to get the Shah to sign such statements than to issue a firman dismissing Mossadeq. It was also believed that the action of replacing Mossadeq would be initiated through the Majlis...

The station was now in direct contact with Zahedi, who had left his sanctuary in the Majlis on 21 July...

With Roosevelt's arrival in Tehran the situation was restudied. As a part of the war of nerves against Mossadeq, it was considered advisable to cut down close contacts between high-ranking US officials and officials of Mossadeq's government... At this stage it was decided to alter the nature and number of documents which would have to be signed by the Shah. These documents would be limited to one firman naming Zahedi as Chief of Staff and one letter denouncing the government-staged referendum on the question of the dissolution of the Majlis as an illegal proceeding... It was stated that very effective use had been made of the 28 July statement by Secretary of State Dulles* (made at CIA's

*This statement, made at a press conference, was as follows: 'The growing activities of the illegal Communist Party in Iran and the toleration of them by the Iranian Government has caused our government concern. These developments make it more difficult to grant aid to Iran.'

suggestion). A request was made that US papers reflect the Iranian press campaign against Mossadeq and that inspired articles be placed in the US press.

On 1 August, two days after Princess Ashraf had left Iran and the Shah had heard the BBC message designed to convince him that Asadollah Rashidian was the official spokesman of the UK Government, Schwarzkopf had an extended meeting with the Shah. Fearful of planted microphones, the Shah led the General into a grand ballroom, pulled a small table to its exact center, and they both sat on the table. The Shah rejected the proposal that he sign the required documents at once, asserting that he was not fully confident of the loyalty of the army; that he must give advance approval for all members of a new cabinet; and that he must have time to make his own estimate as to the probable success or failure of the undertaking. On the other hand, he said that should Mossadeq carry through his referendum and dissolve the Majlis then he, himself, would have full powers under the constitution to dismiss Mossadeq and replace him by a prime minister of his own choice...

During this period Mossadeq, as always, had been on the alert to try to hold the initiative and keep his growing opposition off balance. His attention turned toward the Majlis, where opposition appeared to be hardening. On 14 July he directed the deputies supporting the government to resign. Several of the neutral or timidly anti-Mossadeq deputies followed suit until a total of 28 had resigned. Headquarters urged that the anti-Mossadeq deputies be given every encouragement to keep their posts and to take up bast (political sanctuary) in the Majlis. The theme to be built up was that those who had not resigned from the Majlis would constitute the legitimate parliamentary body. This stand was at least partially responsible for Mossadeq's growing belief that the body must be dissolved. Such action would leave him as the undisputed dictator of the country since his full-powers bill had several months more to run. However, he still had to get around the provision of the constitution that only the Shah had the authority to dissolve the Majlis. He did this by staging a national referendum in which the people were to state 'yes' or 'no' to the question as to whether the Majlis should be dissolved. The referendum was a clear and palpable fake. Held throughout the country beginning 4 August, some two million were said to have voted for dissolution and only a few hundred against. As a maneuver the action was not as satisfactory as Mossadeq anticipated since it clearly revealed abuse of the constitution. This provided an issue on which Mossadeq could be relentlessly attacked by the CIA/SIS subsidized opposition press. The action also did much to alarm the more stable and established elements of the populace, who were nationalists along with everyone else, but who did not favor such a fraudulent breach of the constitution.

During the days of the referendum the station reported in detail on the multiple efforts of station agents to exploit the illegality of this referendum, both before and during the event. Also every declaration made by a religious leader in these days stressed this point. The station indicated that some 20 local newspapers were now in violent opposition to Mossadeq and that some 15 Headquarters prepared anti-

Mossadeq cartoons had appeared in these papers during the referendum week. On 4 August word reached the station that Mossadeq was aware of the true purpose of the visit of Ashraf, and the personnel on the scene felt strongly that action must be mounted very soon...In these same days, Henderson, officials of the State Department, and officials of the Foreign Office were drafting proposed statements which their governments planned to issue upon the successful conclusion of TPAJAX.

At Tehran the meetings with the Shah were continuing. On 2 August Asodollah Rashidian had presented His Majesty with specific details concerning the manner in which the operation would be carried out, and reported that the Shah had agreed to dismiss Mossadeq and to appoint Zahedi as both Prime Minister and Deputy Commander-in-Chief. The Shah also agreed to name General Vosua as Chief of Staff. On 3 August, Roosevelt had a long and inconclusive session with the Shah. The latter 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 Mossadeq and his force and the Shah and his army, which was still with him, but which would soon slip away. Roosevelt finally said that he would remain at hand a few days longer in expectation of an affirmative decision and then would leave the country; in the latter case the Shah should realize that failure to act could lead only to a Communist Iran or to a second Korea. He concluded by saying that his government was not prepared to accept these possibilities and that some other plan might be carried through. In a later meeting with the Shah, the latter requested Mr. Roosevelt to solicit from President Eisenhower assurances that it was advisable for the Shah to take the initiative in removing Mossadeq. Mr. Roosevelt stated that he would pass this request on to the President, but he was very confident that the latter would adopt the attitude that the Shah had already had US desires made adequately clear to him. By complete coincidence and good fortune, the President, while addressing the Governors' Convention in Seattle on 4 August, deviated from his script to state by implication that the United States would not sit idly by and see Iran fall behind the Iron Curtain. Mr. Roosevelt used the President's statements to good effect, by telling the Shah that Eisenhower did indeed feel further assurances of US attitude toward Mossadeq were unnecessary but that his reference to Iran in the Governors' Convention speech was made to satisfy the Shah...On 7 August Rashidian met again with the Shah who agreed that action should be taken on the night of either the 10th or 11th. On 8 August Roosevelt again saw the Shah and struggled against a mood of stubborn irresolution which broke down to the extent that the Shah agreed to give oral encouragement to selected army officers who would participate in the action. Then, he said, he would go to Ramsar and let the army act without his official knowledge, adding that if the action was successful he would name Zahedi as Prime Minister. On 9 August Rashidian took over the struggle in his turn and reported that the Shah would leave for Ramsar on the 12th, and that prior to his departure he would see Zahedi and key officers and express

orally his choice of Zahedi as the new head of the government.

On 10 August Colonel [] saw the Shah and informed him of the names of the army officers who were ready to take action upon receipt of an order from the Shah. The Shah again asserted that while he approved of the plan for action he would sign no papers. [] registered a protest at this decision, and the Shah again sent for Rashidian to discuss this all important point. Rashidian carried a message from Roosevelt to the effect that the latter would leave in complete disgust unless the Shah took action within a few days. At the conclusion of the audience the Shah stated that he would sign the papers, would see Zahedi, and then would leave for Ramsar on the Caspian. The next day he did see Zahedi and did leave for Ramsar, but the papers, contrary to the promise of the Rashidians, were not ready for the signature of the Shah. The Shah thus promised to sign the papers as soon as they were sent to him at Ramsar...

At this time the psychological campaign against Mossadeq was reaching its climax. The controllable press was going all out against Mossadeq, while [] under station direction was printing material which the station considered to be helpful. CIA agents gave serious attention to alarming the religious leaders at Tehran by issuing black propaganda in the name of the Tudeh Party, threatening these leaders with savage punishment if they opposed Mossadeq. Threatening phone calls were made to some of them, in the name of the Tudeh, and one of several planned sham bombings of the houses of these leaders was carried out.

The word that the Shah would support direct action on his behalf spread rapidly through the 'Colonels' conspiracy' fostered by the station... CIA officer Carroll maintained close contact with [] and members of the 'Colonels' conspiracy,' and on 13 August was present at the final meeting of those individuals to whom would fall the responsibility of carrying out the operational staff plan. However, this meeting was the last one in which the station was represented, and the fact that contact was broken proved to have serious results.

Late on the evening of 13 August, Colonel [] returned to Tehran with the firmans signed by the Shah and delivered them to Zahedi; according to his story (which has never been confirmed), it was Queen Soraya who finally convinced the Shah that he must sign. If this is true, here was an ally from a totally unexpected quarter.

On 14 August the station cabled that upon the conclusion of TPAJAX the Zahedi government, in view of the empty treasury of the country, would be in urgent need of funds. The sum of \$5,000,000 was suggested, and CIA was asked to produce this amount almost within hours after the conclusion of the operation...

The precise order of events of the night of 15 August 1953 has not yet been established in all detail. The early accounts of various participants differed widely enough to make it impossible to follow the slender thread of truth through the dark night. However, the main outline of this first try is clear, as are two basic facts connected with it. These facts are: that the plan was betrayed by the indiscretion of one of the Iranian Army officer participants – primarily because of the protracted delay – and that it still might have succeeded in spite of this advance

warning had not most of the participants proved to be inept or lacking in decision at the critical juncture...

Apparent failure

At 0545 hours on the morning of 16 August 1953, Radio Tehran came on the air with a special government communiqué covering the so-called abortive coup of the night just ending, and by 0600 hours Mossadeq was meeting with his cabinet to receive reports on the situation and to take steps to strengthen the security forces at government buildings and other vital points. Again at 0730 hours the communiqué was broadcast... The first need was to establish contact with Ardeshir Zahedi, son of General Zahedi. At 0800 hours he sent word to the station of his whereabouts, and Roosevelt drove up to Shimran – the summer resort section north of Tehran – to hear that Areshir and his father felt that there was still hope in the situation. It was immediately decided that a strong effort must be made to convince the Iranian public that Zahedi was the legal head of the government and that Mossadeq was the usurper who had staged a coup... This action was initiated by employing station communications facilities to relay a message to the New York Associated Press (AP) office stating that: ‘Unofficial reports are current to the effect that leaders of the plot are armed with two decrees of the Shah, one dismissing Mossadeq and the other appointing General Zahedi to replace him.’ ...

By 0930 hours the city was calm, with shops opening and people going about their normal business. However, tanks, extra soldiers, and police were stationed at key points, including the royal palaces which were sealed off from outside contact. Rumors began to circulate. The one that gained early attention was to the effect that the alleged coup had been inspired by the government in order to give Mossadeq an excuse to move against the Shah. At about this time Roosevelt sent General McClure to see General Riahi, Chief of Staff, to ask whether the US Military Mission was still accredited to Mossadeq or someone else, as the Embassy had heard that an imperial firman had been issued naming Zahedi as Prime Minister. Riahi denied that the firman had been ‘authentically signed’ and stated that: ‘Iran and its people are more important than the Shah or any particular government,’ and that the army was ‘of the people and would support the people.’ ...

It was now well into the morning, after the papers had been out for some time. *Shojat*, the substitute for the principal Tudeh paper, *Besuye Ayandeh*, had been predicting a coup since 13 August. It now stated that the plans for the alleged coup had been made after a meeting between the Shah and General Schwarzkopf on 9 August, but that Mossadeq had been tipped off on the 14th. It should be noted that the Tudeh appeared to be at least as well posted on the coup plans as the government – how is not known. The station principal agent team of [] working on their own and with singular shrewdness, had put out a special broadsheet which documented the current rumor but twisted it to read that the alleged coup was arranged to force out the Shah. The morning issue of *Mellat-i-Ma* told this same story, while a first mention of the firman naming Zahedi was given on an inner page of the large circulation daily *Keyhan*.

At 1000 hours another communiqué added a few details to the earlier one. By this time the Tudeh party members, organized in small groups, were making speeches in many parts of the city, while smaller groups of pro-Mossadeq nationalists were also out in the streets. Then a fresh rumor made the rounds: that a plot had existed but that, when it had failed to materialize, Mossadeq had staged a fake coup. At 1100 hours two correspondents of *The New York Times* were taken to Shimran, by station arrangement, to see Zahedi. Instead, they saw his son, Ardeshir, who showed them the original of the imperial firman naming Zahedi as Prime Minister and gave them photostatic copies. These photostats had been made by Iranian participants in the plan. Following this meeting the station took charge of the firman, had its own photostats made, and kept the original locked up in the station safe until final victory. At noon Radio Tehran put out a very brief statement signed by Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq (without his title of Prime Minister being used) stating that: 'According to the will of the people, expressed by referendum, the 17th Majlis is dissolved. Elections for the 18th session will be held soon.' It was this statement, together with the following violently anti-Shah remarks of Fatemi (Foreign Minister) and the undisguised and freely-preached republican propaganda of the Tudeh Party, that was instrumental in persuading the general public that Mossadeq was on the verge of eliminating the monarchy...

During the afternoon the station was at work preparing a public statement from General Zahedi... one of the Rashidians did ten copies on a Persian typewriter. These were rushed to General Zahedi for his signature and then given out to the foreign correspondents, to local pressmen and to two key army officers... station agents composed a fabricated interview with Zahedi and had it printed on the 17th, along with a copy of the firman...

That evening about 1930 hours crowds massed in the Majlis Square to hear speeches, and the proceedings were rebroadcast over Radio Tehran. The speakers included pro Mossadeq ex-Majlis deputies Mosavi, Dr. Szyyid Ali Shayegan, Engineer Zirakzadeh, Engineer Razavi, and Foreign Minister Fatemi. All the speakers attacked the Shah and demanded that he abdicate. During the course of these speeches, the public was informed for the first time that the Shah had fled to Baghdad...

Allowing for the seven hour difference in time, Headquarters received the first message from the station on the non-success of the coup at 0130 hours on the 16th, and a few hours thereafter was working on the station's request to get the Shah to broadcast from Baghdad. As the working day ended, they had to report to the station that the State Department was firmly opposed to any American effort to contact the Shah and suggested the British do it. At Nicosia they responded enthusiastically to the station's suggestion, and the SIS attempted to get permission from London to have Leavitt and Darbyshire flown to Baghdad by RAF jet fighter early in the morning of the 17th, for the purpose of exerting pressure on the Shah. London refused permission... Throughout the morning Iranians with good radios were able to get word from foreign stations of statements that the Shah had made in Baghdad. He said: 'What has taken place in

Iran cannot be considered a coup d'état in the real sense.' The Shah said he had issued his orders for the dismissal of Dr. Mossadeq under the prerogatives given to him by the constitution, and had appointed General Zahedi in his place... The station suggested that Imam Khalasi, religious divine at Baghdad, and the Agha Khan be enlisted to give the Shah moral backing, while Headquarters, on State Department instructions, continued to refuse permission for direct US contact with the Shah...

Rumors circulated to the effect that the arrested officers were to be hanged on 20 August, and throughout the unit commands of the Tehran garrison, the police, and the gendarmerie, officers met to discuss the situation. Several of them resolved to risk all to attempt to rescue their friends.

...It was now obvious that public knowledge of the existence of the firmans was having an effect. Everyone was asking questions: 'Was it true that the Shah had issued the firmans? If so, why was Mossadeq lying about it? Wasn't that a most reprehensible thing to do?'

...The evening was a most active and trying time for the station. Principal agents [] were reached and given instructions. Within the Embassy compound, Roosevelt and Carroll held a prolonged council of war with the heads of their team: General Zahedi and Ardeshir Zahedi, General [] the three Rashidian brothers, and Colonel []. These teammates were, when required, smuggled in and out of the compound in the bottom of cars and in closed jeeps. A few hundred yards away Ambassador Henderson and General McClure were out in the garden in front of the residency, and Roosevelt wore a path back and forth to reassure them that no Persians were hidden out in the compound, so that they could in all honesty so inform Mossadeq if the question were asked. The council of war went on for about four hours, and in the end it was decided that some action would be taken on Wednesday the 19th. As preparation for this effort, several specific activities were to be undertaken. In the field of political action, it was planned to send the Tehran cleric [Ayatollah Behbehani] to Qum to try to persuade the supreme cleric, Ayatollah Borujerdi, to issue a fatwa (religious decree) calling for a holy war against Communism, and also to build up a great demonstration on Wednesday on the theme that it was time for loyal army officers and soldiers and the people to rally to the support of religion and the throne. In the field of military action, support from outside of Tehran seemed essential... Propaganda guidance was sent to the stations in Karachi, New Delhi, Cairo, Damascus, Istanbul, and Beirut to the effect that the Zahedi government was the only legal one...

At Nicosia the SIS refused to give up hope, and bucked against their own office in London and against the Foreign Office...

The 18th was to be the most trying day for every person in every country who was aware of the project. At 0730 hours that morning the Shah left Baghdad for Rome on a regular BOAC commercial flight. It would be some hours before this news reached Tehran. In Tehran the day opened with small bands roaming the streets. The Tudeh managed to ransack the Pan Iranist Party headquarters... located near the Majlis Square, and then there were minor clashes between gangs

of the Tudeh and the Third Force (a Marxist, non-Tudeh opposition group)... *Shojat*, replacement for *Besuye Ayandeh* and, hence, the leading organ of the Tudeh Party, printed a statement by the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party – the first such statement to appear for some weeks. In this statement the party blamed the recent events on Anglo-American intrigue, and added that the watchword for the day must be: ‘...Down with the monarchy! Long live the democratic republic!’ During the morning the AP correspondent wired out a story, destined to get considerable play abroad, which included Zahedi’s statement to the officers of the Iranian Army: ‘Be ready for sacrifice and loss of your lives for the maintenance of independence and of the monarchy of Iran and of the holy religion of Islam which is now being threatened by infidel Communists.’ ...

Security forces were given orders to clear the streets and serious fighting resulted... The Tudeh did seem to take rapid cognizance of the facts that a covert action was being staged, and that their members were not strong enough to fight the police. They brought people out who tried to argue demonstrators into going home.

Headquarters spend a day featured by depression and despair. The immediate direction of the project moved from the Branch and Division to the highest level. At the end of the morning a handful of people worked on the draft of a message which was to call off the operation. As the message was finally sent, in the evening, it was based on the Department of State’s tentative stand: ‘that the operation has been tried and failed,’ the position of the United Kingdom that: ‘we must regret that we cannot consider going on fighting’ and Headquarters’ position that, in the absence of strong recommendations to the contrary from Roosevelt and Henderson, operations against Mossadeq should be discontinued.

‘The Shah is victorious’

While on the 18th only *Shahed* had published the imperial firman naming Zahedi as Prime Minister, on 19 August, as soon as the city was awake, early risers could see photostats or typeset copies of the firman in the papers *Setareh Islam*, *Asia Javanan*, *Aram*, *Mard-i-Asia*, *Mellat-i-Ma*, and the *Journal de Tehran*. The first four of these papers, and *Shahed* and *Dad* in addition, ran an alleged interview with Zahedi which stressed that his government was the only legal one in existence – an interview that had been fabricated. Somewhat later in the morning the first of many thousands of broadsheets which carried a photostatic copy of the firman and the text of the Zahedi statement appeared in the streets...

The news that something quite startling was happening spread at great speed throughout the city. Just when it reached Mossadeq, who was meeting with members of his cabinet, is not known. By 0900 hours the station did have this news, and by 1000 hours word had come in that both the *Bakhtar-i-Emruz* office and the headquarters of the Iran Party had been ransacked. Also about 1000 hours contact was established with the Rashidian brothers who seemed full of glee. Their instructions, as well as orders directed to [] were now to attempt to swing security forces to the side of the demonstrators and to encourage action for the

capture of Radio Tehran...

Fairly early in the morning Colonel [] one of those involved in the staff planning, appeared in the square before the Majlis with a tank which he had secured from the Second Battalion of the Second Armored Brigade... Lt. Col. [] and Captain [] were on hand and were joined by two trucks from the same battalion, while members of the disbanded Imperial Guard seized trucks and drove through the streets. By 1015 hours there were pro-Shah truckloads of military personnel at all the main squares.

While small groups had penetrated to the north of the city by 0930 hours, the really large groups, armed with sticks and stones, came from south Tehran and merged as they reached Sepah Square in their progress north toward the center of the city. There the troops held in readiness fired hundred of shots over the heads of the crowd, but apparently were not willing to fire at these partisans of the Shah...

At about 1030 hours, General Riahi informed Mossadeq that he no longer controlled the army and asked for relief, but Mossadeq visited his office and told him to hold firm. Colonel Momtaz was able to assemble only one battalion and disposed that force around Mossadeq's house.

About noon separate elements composing the crowds began to receive direct leadership from the military and police. Those army officers previously alerted to take part in the military operations provided by TPAJAX were now taking separate but proper individual action. By 1300 hours the central headquarters of the telegraph office on Sepah Square had fallen into royalist hands. The AP man filed a cable there shortly after 1300 hours giving a brief report on the fighting. Then fighting moved a few hundred yards away to the police headquarters and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building just across the wide avenue from it. Defenders of the police station held out until nearly 1600 hours... By early afternoon more of the important objectives in the center of the city, such as the press and propaganda offices, had been taken over by the royalists. With important facilities under control, it was possible to begin dispatch of streams of telegrams to the provinces urging them to rise in support of the Shah... Early in the afternoon the crowds did collect around approaches to Mossadeq's residence. By this time he had probably already left.

Radio Tehran was a most important target, for its capture not only sealed the success at the capital, but was effective in bringing the provincial cities quickly into line with the new government... after a brief struggle in which three deaths were reported, at 1412 hours the station was in royalist hands. At 1420 hours it broadcast the first word of the success of the royalist effort, including a reading of the firman...

At the Embassy, station personnel were following the broadcasts of Radio Tehran, and were elated when it suddenly fell into royalist hands. Once again Roosevelt set off toward the hiding place of his valuable charges, meeting them a little before 1600 hours. Told it was time for them to play an active role, both promptly dressed for the occasion. It was agreed that General Zahedi should meet General [] at 1630 hours on a certain street corner with a tank, and should proceed

with this vehicle to Radio Tehran where Zahedi would speak to the nation. General [] was taken from the house by Major Keyser in a jeep; and then along the way, he spied two Air Force officers, he asked to be let out, saying he would take care of everything. Right on the street these officers greeted him warmly and when he said he would like a tank, they soon rounded one up. Asked if he knew where Zahedi was, he said he did and that he had an appointment to meet him at 1630 hours. His comrades pressured him to make an immediate rendezvous with Zahedi, so he directed the tank toward the compound in which the house sheltering Zahedi was situated. Zahedi emerged and the tank set off again. At 1725 hours Zahedi spoke over Radio Tehran, and this speech was repeated a little after 2100 hours that evening...

Within Tehran proper the last nests of resistance were being subdued. The Chief of Staff headquarters gave in at the end of the afternoon, and before 1900 hours Mossadeq's house was taken and soon turned into a shambles. Its belongings were dragged out into the street and sold to passers-by. Reactions were also being reported from the provinces. At 1450 hours the regional station at Sanandaj in Kurdistan suddenly went off the air. At 1555 hours Radio Tabriz reported the capture of the station itself by forces loyal to the Shah, and stated that all of Azerbaijan was in the hands of the army...

Colonel [] following Zahedi's instruction, and Carroll now closed up the operation. While Batmangelich had been named Chief of Staff, [] – at that office – kept in touch by phone and placed known supporters of TPAJAX in command of all units of the Tehran garrison, seized key military targets, and executed the arrest lists...

The full text of this Clandestine Service History is to be published by Spokesman (see www.spokesmanbooks.com).