

Eisenhower, the CIA, and the 1953 Coup on Mossadeq:

Assessing the Role of the CIA and whether the 1953 Coup was Justified under Leffler's National Security Principle



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Date of Submission: 14/06/2024

English Language and Culture / American Studies

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. J.H.H. van den Berk.

Title of document: BA Thesis American Studies Sander Kesselaar s1025154

Name of course: BA Thesis American Studies

Date of submission: 14/06/2024

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Abstract

In 2013 the CIA declassified and released documents related to the 1953 coup d'état on Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq. This thesis sets out to investigate whether the justification of the Eisenhower administration for the coup was feasible, and what the role was of the CIA in the coup. The coup's arguments are contrasted with Leffler's 1990 iteration of the National Security Principle and Eisenhower's fixed principles. The research question of this thesis is: Why would President Eisenhower utilize the CIA to orchestrate the 1953 Iranian coup, and how reasonable was this decision considering the relevant factors? The CIA was utilized for the coup to ensure plausible deniability for the administration and to try out Eisenhower's foreign policy directives of active containment. The justification was made under false pretenses due to meddling by key individuals and Operation BEDAMN and AJAX to deteriorate the socio-political circumstances in Iran. Declassified CIA reports underline that the Communist threat in Iran had been exaggerated and that the coup was only justifiable on the notion to appease an ally and to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to crucial foreign resources, in this case oil.

List of keywords

Iran, American Foreign Policy, Eisenhower administration, Cold War, CIA, National Security, Mossadeq, Operation BEDAMN, Operation AJAX, coup, containment, oil, Communism, plausible deniability, Truman

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Introduction

In 2013, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) declassified documents under the Freedom of Information Act that confirmed what many had previously expected and what was considered an ‘public secret:’ that the CIA played an important role in overthrowing the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammed Mossadeq, in 1953. The documents also confirmed that President Eisenhower had known of the operation and had given the CIA the greenlight to execute the coup, codenamed AJAX. This raises the central research question of this thesis: Why would President Eisenhower utilize the CIA to orchestrate the 1953 Iranian coup, and how reasonable was this decision considering the relevant factors?

The CIA has fascinated the academic field ever since its establishment by the Truman administration in 1947. Authors such as Jeffreys-Jones and Weiner have delved into the rich and recent history of the organization, while authors such as Gasiorowski (2013), Bayandor, and Takeyh have written about the involvement of the CIA in foreign countries, specifically Iran. Furthermore, authors such as McCarthy, Sarkesian, and Westad have investigated the legacy of the CIA and its importance to American National Security. Authors such as Jervis and Walsh have published about the Iran-Contra affair, and Streeter, Brockett, Friedman, and LaFeber (1969) have written about Eisenhower and the Guatemalan coup in 1954, but something similar has yet to be done with the 1953 Iranian coup. The current state of research on the CIA investigates its relevance to American National Security, or how it has been involved in large-scale operations on foreign territory. The current debate somewhat negates the CIA’s impact on foreign policy and its role in American National Security. Authors such as Thompson & Frenzos, Gaddis, Sewell & Scott, and Bletz have examined the foreign policy of President Eisenhower, but what seems to be left out of the debate is how the national security perspective provides an insight into whether the 1953 Iranian coup was legitimate, and why Eisenhower would have been interested in utilizing the CIA to orchestrate the coup.

One author, Ramos, has engaged with the subject of the CIA as a means for expanding the American interest in foreign policy. Ramos' work could be seen as filling a similar academic niche as this thesis wants to fill. Ramos, however, focuses on the rise of the CIA and how Eisenhower impacted and shaped the Agency, while this thesis will investigate how the CIA and important individuals and socio-political circumstances influenced Eisenhower to consent to overthrowing the Mossadeq cabinet.

To work out how the CIA achieved this and what the relevant circumstances were that made the coup desirable for the Eisenhower administration, it is necessary to provide the context of Iran during the early 1950s, the shift between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations in foreign policy and approach to the Iranian situation, and which key individuals have shaped Eisenhower's approach to Mossadeq and Iran. This will be done through the constructivist approach, as it is presented in Nye & Welch's *Understanding Global Conflict & Cooperation* (1, 14-15) and supplemented by Fierke's chapter in *International Relations Theory* (in Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 161-178), and through Leffler's National Security principle, outlined in his 1990 work.

Leffler's Principle

Understanding Eisenhower's foreign policy and the role the CIA played in it from the constructivist perspective is difficult without considering national security. Nye & Welch's constructivist theory will be linked to Leffler's definition of national security from his article in *The Journal of American History*, conveniently named *National Security* (143-152). Leffler defines national security and its approach to foreign policy as the following:

“National security policy encompasses the decisions and actions deemed imperative to protect domestic core values from external threats. The national security approach provides an overall interpretive framework for studying foreign policy because it

forces historians to analyze the foreign as well as domestic factors shaping policy” (143).

Leffler combines several approaches to create a framework that is not only dynamic but also capable of relating “foreign threats to internal core values” and how underlying domestic and foreign factors interact to shape policy (143-144). Leffler furthermore believes that it is imperative for the study of national security that “analysts distinguish between realities and perceptions, ... because it is often harder for historians to agree on what constituted an actual danger than on what was a perceived threat” (144). He also states that “views of a potential adversary, ... are heavily influenced by perceptions of other variables” (144). Leffler emphasized the need for core values, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, the relevant socio-political factors present during the conception of the CIA, Eisenhower’s installment as President, and the origin of the Iranian conflict will be outlined, as described through Nye & Welch’s constructivist approach. In Chapter 2, Leffler’s approach to core values, Eisenhower’s foreign policy, and the role the CIA played in Iran and Eisenhower’s foreign policy will be outlined in Chapter Two. The justification for the coup, the role that the CIA played in it, and how the coup plays into Leffler’s principle will be investigated in Chapter Three. The arguments made in Chapter Three are revisited in Chapter Four to argue whether the Eisenhower administration’s concerns and justification regarding the coup were reasonable and whether the CIA had been utilized by officials close to Eisenhower to influence his decision-making.

Discussion on Reliability

This study does not come without concerns, and some authors utilized within this thesis should be approached with caution. The author Stephen Ambrose and his book *Ike's Spies* are critical of the President; however, Ambrose was closely involved in writing the biography of Eisenhower and he might approach Eisenhower's administration more positively. Furthermore, Zahrani is a representative of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and thus views the 1953 coup from a pro-Iranian perspective. The issue with the CIA is that material on the organization is written by authors or scholars who have either been employed by the CIA or held close relations with the organization. The main argument here is comparable to Balaghi's: most of the information available to the public are either memoirs that have been "sanitized" by their respective agencies or specific reports and heavily redacted articles that are difficult to read or make sense of (71-92). "Sanitization" is a term used to describe censoring sensitive, classified, or important information to an institution, in this case, the CIA (Balaghi, 71-72). There is a possibility that the content of Cline's book, as with Roosevelt's and Koch's, has been sanitized. It then becomes difficult to discern what parts of the information are objective and what has been fabricated.

Operation BEDAMN has been a relatively complex issue to investigate, as other than Gasiorowski (1987, 2013), no author has investigated this specific part of the CIA's covert operation. This makes it difficult to examine the legitimacy and reliability of this thesis's chapters on the CIA in Iran. Even Ghazvinian builds his chapter on the 1953 coup on a few sources, one of which being Gasiorowski's 1987 article, and he utilizes Woodhouse's and Roosevelt's memoirs and Kinzer's heavily speculative book on the 1953 coup to build his case on the operation. What part of the available information is legitimate, and what has been filtered by the CIA? In the case of national security, it is only logical that not all documents

are available or classified, but this, unfortunately, makes it somewhat difficult to discern what part is true and what part is fabricated to protect American interests.

Chapter 1: Constructivism and the Relevant Socio-Historical Factors Related to the CIA, Truman, Eisenhower, and Iran

This chapter will dive into the relevant historical, social, and political factors that apply to understanding the reasoning behind undertaking the 1953 coup in Iran, undertaken by the CIA at the behest of President Eisenhower. These factors will be set out through Nye & Welch's constructivist approach. Leffler's principle on core values will be discussed in Chapter Two. Constructivism will help us understand the relevant socio-historical factors that influenced Eisenhower and Truman. Constructivism requires this study to consider how the CIA became relevant in American Foreign policy. The relevant socio-historical circumstances regarding Iran will also be set out to understand why Eisenhower would consider a coup. What changed between Truman and Eisenhower regarding socio-political circumstances? What happened in Iran that made Eisenhower consider a coup d'état against a democratically elected Prime Minister?

Defining Constructivism

Nye & Welch provide a short and a longer definition of constructivism in their book, with the shortened definition being the following:

“An analytical approach to international relations that emphasize the importance of ideas, norms, cultures, and social structures in shaping actors' identities, interests, and actions” (1).

They state that other forms of international paradigms such as realism and liberalism “both fail to explain long-term change in world politics adequately” (Nye & Welch, 14-15). They stress that “constructivists emphasize the importance of ideas and culture in shaping both the reality and the discourse of international politics,” and that “we need not just explanations of

how things are, but explanations of how they come to be” (Nye & Welch, 15). Constructivists underline the importance of the individual’s morals and identity, and how these change over time (15). This definition will help make sense of the shift between the war-time President Truman and the Cold War President Eisenhower and how they utilized the CIA as the executive. Furthermore, constructivism implies the importance of individual agency and the possibility of the agent to “influence their environment, as well as to be influenced by it,” while underlining the importance of causality and epistemological explanations of important events (Fierke in Dunne, Kurki, & Smith, 165, 167). Now that the relevant definition has been provided, it will be necessary to investigate the earlier-mentioned historical context.

The Origin of the CIA under Truman

Before the Second World War, the Army, the State Department, and the Navy all gathered information separately and rarely exchanged the relevant information with the other branches. This changed in 1942 when Roosevelt formed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a committee, led by General William J. Donovan, that centralized wartime information gathering and was specifically designed for the war. The Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 had been a wake-up call and stimulus for Roosevelt to listen to Donovan’s plea for a strategic group that could assist in the war effort (Jeffrey-Jones, 16-19). Truman disbanded the continuation of the OSS in Donovan’s image after the war under the notion that it had the “earmarks of a Gestapo” (Weiner, 8). During the War, Truman had been fascinated and “impressed by his brief experience of the wartime British–American Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) alliance that on 12 September 1945 he approved its peacetime continuation” (Andrew in Leffler & Westad, 418). After the war, Truman wanted to prevent the United States from falling into another economic depression. To achieve this, Truman and his advisers believed “that they needed an open world trading environment to sustain demand” (Leffler in Leffler & Westad, 68).

Potential geopolitical enemies were to be hampered in gaining access to vital natural resources, as they would otherwise form a threat to the Western Hemisphere. Truman and his advisers wanted to “use American power to forge an international environment conducive to the American way of life,” and thus “forge a new world order based on nonaggression, self-determination, equal access to raw materials, non-discriminatory trade, and participation in an international organization” (Leffler in Leffler & Westad, 68).

The role of the CIA was at this time still in discussion. In 1947, Truman ordered his cabinet to establish an intergovernmental organization that would gather and present relevant and important intelligence to the President regarding American National Security. Truman had benefitted from the OSS, yet after the war, “he needed information to use his power” as President (Weiner, 3-8). General Magruder argued during a meeting with officials from the Pentagon and the State Department that “a new clandestine service would have to take charge” to perform the “extralegal and sometimes illegal” operations that were necessary to extract vital intelligence, and that the “Pentagon and State Department could not risk running those missions (Weiner, 12-14). After some turbulence with the State Department and Congress, the Central Intelligence Agency was established when Congress passed the legislature now known as the National Security Act of July 1947 (Weiner, 14; Jeffreys-Jones, 25-34; Warner, 1-127). At first, the CIA was not tasked with covert action or overthrowing foreign governments.¹ Truman wrote that “it was intended merely as a center to keep the President informed on what was going on in the world” (Weiner, 3).

¹ For more specific information on the origin of the CIA, I suggest reading the works of Cline, Weiner, Warner, and Jeffreys-Jones.

American Interest in Iran and Mossadeq

At first, the United States was primarily focused on isolationist tactics in countries outside the Western hemisphere. In 1947, Iran caught the eye of the Truman administration. At first, Iran was not seen as of political or strategic importance for American foreign interests, as the British had been dominant within the region with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The United States and the CIA only became more involved in Iran the moment the Truman administration learned that the Soviet Union planned to establish a trade route through northern Iran to gain access to the oil fields, and after the Soviets refused to pull out their military assets from Northern Iran. The U.S. feared a potential Soviet takeover and decided to increase the presence of CIA agents and American personnel in Iran (Brands, 6-11; Gasiorowski, 1991, 46-52). Before detailing the covert operations undertaken in Iran, it must be made clear what exactly covert operations are. Andrews describes covert action as “secret attempts to manipulate the course of events by methods ranging from bribing opinion formers to paramilitary operations” (in Leffler & Westad, 422). Iranian oil needed to remain under Allied influence, prompting the Truman administration to investigate how far the influence of the Soviets ran. This mission was codenamed BEDAMN and started in 1948 (Brands, 10; Gasiorowski, 1991, 50-54; Ghazvinian, 192). During this time, Iran asked the U.S. to provide it financial aid. The U.S. hesitated to help Iran, as they feared that they would provoke the Soviet Union (Gasiorowski, 1991, 52-53).

There was however another factor that came into play during this time. The Shah and the AIOC tried to hold secret negotiations in 1943-44 on more oil concessions, but politician Mohammed Mossadeq, supported by the Majles, the Soviet-backed politicians in the Tudeh Party, and Ayatollahs, thwarted this plan, outlawing further oil concessions (Brands, 10-12; Gasiorowski, 1991, 42-46). The late 1940s and early 1950s were a turbulent time for Iranian politics. Furthermore, Prime Minister Said and the Shah had tried to rig the elections in 1950

to consolidate the Shah's power. Mossadeq caught wind of this scheme and organized massive protests in Teheran and other major cities. These protests were successful and led to free elections in 1950, where the newly established National Front party (N-F), spearheaded by Mossadeq, won the election. Mossadeq had vowed to nationalize the oil reserves from AIOC and formally accepted the role of Prime Minister in April 1951 (Brands, 35-41; Gasiorowski, 1991, 46-50, 58-61).

The Americans pressured the British to make concessions to the Majles and Mossadeq. The British were trying to bribe and manipulate socialites and upper-class, allied politicians through covert action operations to oppose, actively tamper with, and work against Mossadeq's regime. Mossadeq knew of the tampering, and he resigned from office. The N-F and the Majles started massive protests in the large cities, calling for the reinstatement of Mossadeq and the removal of British influence in Iran. After five days, Mossadeq was restored to power. In May 1951, Mossadeq nationalized the AIOC and the Iranian oil reserves, after which the British imposed an embargo on Iranian oil. In October 1952, Mossadeq cut off the diplomatic ties with Britain after he learned that the British were plotting a potential coup to install General Zahedi as Prime Minister. Mossadeq previously stated that the "use of excessive, visible force [by the British] might signal the start of World War III." (Brands, 35-44; Gasiorowski, 1991, 56-58, 59-67; Ghazivnian, 160-190).²

McCarthyism's Influence on American Policymaking

The Americans were keeping a close eye on the socio-political circumstances. The social unrest made the Americans reconsider their strategy for Iran, as the tactic under Truman was to keep Iran in the Western camp and guarantee stability in the world oil market, as he

² See Bill (1-98), Bayandor (1-97), Ghazvinian, (140-200), and Gasiorowski (1991, 1-80) for a detailed account of the social unrest in Iran in the 1940s leading to the nationalization of the AIOC.

believed the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute to be a detriment to the region's stability. The oil dispute could potentially disrupt the global trade markets. Furthermore, the Soviet nuclear tests in 1949 and the Chinese revolution had heavily impacted American foreign policy, which became what we now know as "containment:" an aggressive (geo)political strategy aimed at containing Soviet and Communist expansionism (Bischof in Thompson & Frenzos, 169-174; Brands, 9-12, 35-38; Gasiorowski, 1991, 53-56, 67-71).

The nationalization of Iranian oil by Mossadeq kicked off a stream of events, but it is also important to introduce other important individuals who played a key role in American domestic politics and its institutions. These were General Walter Bedell "Beetle" Smith, the brothers John Foster and Allen Welsh Dulles, and Senator Joseph McCarthy. Especially the latter was important in indirectly shaping the foreign policy in Truman's administration and played a key role in the 1952 election and American politics. After the start of the Korean War and during the final two years of his administration, Truman had to deal with domestic issues such as claims of Communist infiltration, corruption within his cabinet, the Republican party criticizing the gradual increase in military and economic expenditures such as the Marshall help, and most importantly, McCarthyism. Fried defines McCarthyism as the following:

"McCarthyism is a political attitude of the mid-twentieth century ... characterized chiefly by the opposition to elements held to be subversive and by the use of tactics involving personal attacks on individuals, employing widely publicized indiscriminate allegations, especially based on unsubstantiated charges." (2)

McCarthyism led to hardlining in the Democratic Party to oppose Communism, resulting in the expansion of financial aid and military spending to prevent foreign nations from falling to Communism (Fried, 5-6). The loss of China, the Korean War, claims of Communist infiltration, and corruption in 1952 were believed sentiments among voters, and the Truman administration became less popular. Senator McCarthy used these sentiments to

further his political agenda, openly criticizing the Truman administration. His rhetoric “fueled the idea that there was something rotten in the federal government,” and the Senator depicted Truman's cabinet as corrupt and incompetent in the face of the Communist threat (Jeffreys-Jones, 64). Senator McCarthy’s crusade to weed out the government of any possible Communist influence harmed most parts of American civilization. This led Truman, who still could run again for the presidency, to not seek a third term in the White House (Branyan & Larsen, 12-15). The Republican party seized the opportunity, and Eisenhower later campaigned on responding to Communist expansion by force (Etges, 503; Fried, 1-182, 185-190). Foreign policy played a major role during the election campaign, and Eisenhower even went out of his way to somewhat appease McCarthy during his campaign, dropping a General Douglas MacArthur tribute during a campaign meeting as the Senator deemed him a Communist. Eisenhower and his future head of the State Department John Foster Dulles refused to fight McCarthy head-on, even though John Foster had a hawkish attitude towards Communism (Branyan & Larsen, 18; LaFeber, 1976, 140-145). The CIA during the final years of the Truman administration had been run by General John Bedell “Beetle” Smith, an individual who held “exemplary right-wing, hardline opinions,” who “swam the tide ... incapable of resisting McCarthyist hysteria,” claiming that there were Communists in the CIA, even though this was not the case (Cline, Jeffreys-Jones, 64-69). It would take John Foster Dulles’ brother Allen Welsh Dulles, the head of the CIA under Eisenhower to openly confront and criticize the Senator to prove that the Agency had not been infiltrated, nor that it was a bulwark for Soviet spying (Jeffreys-Jones, 64-66, 74-77). The importance of McCarthyism can thus not be overlooked.

These were the circumstances in the early 1950s up until the installation of Eisenhower as the 34th President of the United States. The CIA was not just gathering information under the name BEDAMN: it had a much larger role to play in Iran and

Eisenhower's foreign policy. In the upcoming chapters the shift in foreign policy from Truman to Eisenhower, the activities of the CIA, and especially its influence on shaping Eisenhower's foreign policy will be further examined to paint a better picture of how these factors influenced one another and eventually culminated in the 1953 coup d'état in Iran, or better known as Operation AJAX.

Chapter 2: Leffler's Principle of Core Values, Eisenhower's Foreign Policy, and his Interest in the CIA

Leffler's Principle on Core Values

To understand Leffler's National Security Principle, Leffler stresses the need to distinguish the core values that are important to an individual, in this case President Eisenhower. He states the following on core values: "Core values usually fuse material self-interest with more fundamental goals," and to determine these values, "historians must identify key groups, agencies, and individuals, examine their goals and ideas, and analyze how trade-offs are made" (Leffler, 144-145). Leffler sums core values up as the following:

"Core values are the goals that emerge as priorities after the trade-offs are made; core values are the objectives that merge ideological precepts and cultural symbols ... with concrete interests; core values are the interests that are pursued, notwithstanding the costs incurred; core values are the goals worth fighting for" (145).

Leffler furthermore stresses the importance of power to core values. He states the following:

"The protection and pursuit of core values requires the exercise of power. Power is the capacity to achieve intended results. Power may be an end in itself as well as a means toward an end. In the twentieth century, power (including military power) derives primarily from economic capabilities. Power stems from the scale, vigor, and productivity of one's internal economy and its access to or control over other countries' industrial infrastructure, skilled manpower, and raw materials. Power is relative" (Leffler, 146).

Combining the constructivist approach with the national security approach allows this essay to link individual actors, socio-political circumstances, domestic issues, foreign threats, and non-state actors to one another to assess why certain decisions were made in foreign policy,

and eventually, how these different factors led to Eisenhower allowing the 1953 coup to take place. To determine how the administration looked at national security, foreign policy, the CIA, and the case of Iran, it is important to set out what the core values of the Eisenhower administration were, which elements defined Eisenhower's foreign policy, and what the socio-political circumstances were in which Eisenhower became President of the United States.

Eisenhower's Core Values and Foreign Policy

The socio-political circumstances in which Eisenhower became President have been set out in the previous chapter, and it is important to formulate his core values and how these impacted his foreign policy, specifically to Iran. By looking at Eisenhower's inaugural speech, a set of core values can be distinguished: the guarantee of an allied country's independence, freedom, economic prosperity, the search for unity in the international arena through the United Nations, and deterring forces of aggression, distrust, fear, and if necessary, by force. These are known in the speech as his "fixed principles," yet they are a useful resource to understand how his foreign policy came to be (Eisenhower). It is important to shortly re-examine Truman's foreign policy. Truman executed the Truman Doctrine from 1947 onwards, pledging to resist communist expansion anywhere in the world (Painter in Leffler & Westad, 495). In 1950, Truman authorized "a single, comprehensive statement of interests, threats, and feasible responses, capable of communicating throughout the bureaucracy" NSC-68, which Gaddis described as the following:

[NSC-68] "defined 'containment' as an effort 'by all means short of war' to 1) block further expansion of Soviet Power, 2) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions, 3) induce a retraction of the Kremlin's control and influence, and 4) in general, to foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system that the Kremlin is brought at least to

the point of modifying its behavior to conform to generally accepted international standards” (90, 98-99).

This document was formulated after two events took place in rapid succession, later known as the “Twin Shocks:” the first was the successful Soviet nuclear test, with the second event being the victory of the Chinese communists in the civil war (Norton et al., 709).

Gaddis criticized Truman's tenure in the White House as the following:

“The strongest criticism of Truman’s administration’s conduct of foreign and national security policy is that it failed to maintain the proper subordination of means to ends ... process triumphed over policy, with results considerably different from what ... the administration ... would have thought desirable” (87-88).

Eisenhower campaigned on changing some of the policies that Truman implemented, especially governmental spending. John Foster Dulles, who was part of the Truman administration before leaving, criticized the administration’s “gigantic expenditures,” while also having “unilateralist complaints about the cost of existing policies” (Gaddis, 120-121). Eisenhower shared this view, as he was concerned about the increase in Defense expenditures and wanted more funds to be allocated to domestic affairs such as housing and welfare, as “every gun, tank [or bullet] invested in Defense” was a penny not spent on saving the American people from hunger or cold (Gaddis, 132-134). Eisenhower “criticized,” during the 1952 election, “the steady rise in the Truman administration’s defense budget over the previous two years,” fearing that these costs would spiral out of control (McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 288-289). Eisenhower calls this the “Great Equation,” and he states it to be the following in a diary entry in 1952:

“It is necessary to recognize that the purpose of America is to defend a way of life rather than merely to defend property, territory, homes, or lives. As a consequence of this purpose, everything done to develop a defense against external threat, except

under conditions readily recognizable as emergency, must be weighed and gauged in the light of probable long-term, internal, effect.” (Eisenhower qt. by McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 289)

Eisenhower believed that “the foundation of military strength is economic strength. A bankrupt America is more the Soviet goal than an America conquered on the field of battle” (qtd. by McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 289). During his presidential campaign, Eisenhower had to contend with the “McCarthy problem,” which had its high tide in 1952 and 1953, which he “solved by ignoring it” and even going out of his way to somewhat appease the senator during his campaign (Branyan & Larsen, 18; Lafeber, 1976, 140-148). Eisenhower thus ran on three key principles, which he aptly named his “Great Crusade:” the Korean War, Communism, and corruption (Branyan & Larsen, 15-23). One might then expect a major shift in foreign policy when Truman left the Oval Office for Eisenhower on January 20th, 1953, however, Eisenhower and his cabinet decided to continue at least some aspects of NSC-68. Eisenhower favored some of his predecessor’s national security policy, as he believed that “US security in the Cold War required the establishment of a preponderance of American power across the Eurasian heartland” (McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 289). Furthermore, his “administration believed the world balance of power to be so delicately poised that no further victories for communism anywhere could be tolerated without upsetting it” (Gaddis, 130).

Eisenhower’s Interest in the CIA and the Case of Iran

Eisenhower knew it would be difficult to implement large policy changes without the proper funding. It would be a challenge to combine his campaign promises of rolling back Communism with cutting the budget and allocating funds to domestic expenditures.

Eisenhower knew of the importance of a spying agency during his time as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, through ULTRA, TORCH, OVERLORD, and gaining valuable

intelligence from spies in Nazi Germany for D-Day (Ambrose & Immerman, 3-152).

Eisenhower became interested in the CIA as a vessel to implement his foreign policy. The CIA could execute Eisenhower's foreign policy through minimal financial means while achieving major successes. Initially, the Agency's focus was to collect relevant intelligence, but slowly this started to incorporate covert psychological and political action to prevent the spread of Communism. The CIA had been involved in the 1948 elections in Italy, and by only spending a limited amount of money, they managed to prevent a Communist elective victory. It was the first example of Kennan's strategy of containment in action under Truman, as the President issued NSC-1, 2, and 3 to prevent Italy from falling to Communism. There was Congressional and public sentiment to support covert techniques utilized by the CIA to combat similar Soviet activities. Dean Acheson, Truman's Secretary of State, feared that if Italy fell to Communism, France, West Germany, and other countries would follow (Ambrose & Immerman, 165-170; Cline, 97-101, 129-133).

Eisenhower also benefitted from the fact that his new Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Allen Dulles, had been directly involved in setting up a successful covert operation based on psychological action: Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. These were projects that were covert successes in spreading and serving liberal democratic purposes, without becoming a center of controversy (Hudson; Cline, 127-133). These operations not only served in the interest of Eisenhower; his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles favored "disintegration from within opposed to head-on confrontation" with the Soviet Union (Jeffreys-Jones, 94). Since these successes were under the Truman administration and of a psychological and political nature, it can be assumed that Eisenhower wanted to see how the CIA and its covert operations could be utilized in his foreign policy. Iran would become an important training ground for the Eisenhower administration.

At the time, the CIA had already set up its BEDAMN operation to investigate the influence of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party in Iran. Truman at the time did not know that BEDAMN became perhaps the most important operation for the Eisenhower administration to execute Operation AJAX successfully. By the end of 1952, Winston Churchill had returned as Prime Minister of Great Britain and the tensions with Iran were at an all-time high due to British meddling with Iranian politics. Over several years, the British tried to covertly destabilize the political arena and undermine domestic support for Mossadeq, by staging riots, bribing politicians, and even embargoing the Iranian oil sale. Eventually, Mossadeq cut the diplomatic ties with the British after he had learned of their bribery and influence (Bill, 67-74; Gasiorowski, 1991, 48-65; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 494-495; Zahrani, 93-96). Truman did not see a political alternative to Mossadeq in Iran. Before the British diplomatic ouster, Truman had vetoed the British plans of military intervention. Truman condemned both sides of the conflict, criticizing the unilateralist approach of the Iranians regarding the nationalization while also condemning the British' covert operation and their unwillingness to find a compromise on the oil on behalf of the AIOC. The British had by then already drawn up their draft of Operation Boot, their equivalent to AJAX, to depose Mossadeq. They knew that Eisenhower would look more favorable to a potential coup than Truman. They had been advised to hold out on the plan in a 1952 meeting between Allen Dulles, Kermit Roosevelt, and an MI6 officer named Woodhouse (Ambrose & Immerman, 194-196; Bill, 73-78; Etges, 498-503; Gasiorowski, 1991, 65-70).

What Truman did not know was that the CIA had undermined his foreign policy under Operation BEDAMN, something that will be discussed in chapters Three and Four (Gasiorowski, 1991, 71-80; 2013, 4-24). The election of Eisenhower in November 1952 changed the playing field for Churchill and the British. Even though the British were more concerned about their access to oil, they would stress their concern of a Communist takeover

to Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, who was a Communist hardliner (Gaddis, 120-133; Gasiorowski, 2013, 4-15; Ghazvinian, 189-191; McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 290-293; Weiner, 92-94). Another legitimate concern for the Eisenhower administration was that “the Arabs would become neutral in an East-West conflict and susceptible to communist thinking” (LaFeber, 1976, 152-159). According to Leffler’s national security principle and Ike’s core values/fixed principles, Iran had become a liability on three fronts: oil, communism, and its strategic position in the Middle East. These arguments are necessary to understand why the Eisenhower administration would consent to the CIA undertaking the 1953 Iranian coup.

Important Individual Actors Influencing Eisenhower

A few key figures who impacted Eisenhower must be mentioned before moving on to the next chapter. These are the following: the head of the State Department John Foster Dulles, DCI Allen Welsh Dulles, undersecretary of State General Walter Bedell “Beetle” Smith, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, ambassador in Iran Loy Henderson, and the CIA’s head of operations in the Middle East Kermit Roosevelt. John Foster and Allen Welsh Dulles were brothers, and Allen had to thank John Foster for his position as DCI (Jeffreys-Jones, 73). John Foster’s appointment to head of the State Department had been purely political: without John Foster, Eisenhower would not have been the Republican Presidential candidate (Gaddis, 120-129; Lafeber, 140-159). General Smith had been one of Eisenhower’s key subordinates during the Second World War in the European theater, and his appointment was done to deter McCarthy, as the General was a staunch anti-Communist. His experience as an advisor in the Soviet Union was beneficial to Eisenhower, as Smith had experience with dealing with Soviet intelligence experts. Eisenhower had worked closely together with Churchill as Supreme Allied Commander and considered the Prime Minister a close friend. Roosevelt and Henderson were less connected to Eisenhower but were key in convincing the

National Security Council to approve Operation AJAX. Henderson continuously stressed an imminent Communist threat, while Roosevelt had been important on the ground in Iran during AJAX. He was crucial in convincing the Shah to cooperate with the operation and setting AJAX in motion, even improvising on the ground when things went wrong (Ambrose & Immerman, 150-190; Branyan & Larsen, 6-20; Cline, 108-127; Gaddis, 120-130; Roosevelt, 1-150).

The two most important figures in Eisenhower's cabinet, i.e. the Dulles brothers, tended to integrate each other's departments to further their goals. Allen Dulles "would cooperate with ... anyone else, if he believed that to be in the American interest. He aspired to be, above all, a pragmatic patriot" (Jeffreys-Jones, 73). The brothers worked as a team: "They were loyal to their country and to each other in a trade long marked by treachery; they effectively guarded secrets in the interests of national security" (Jeffreys-Jones, 72-75). The brothers were former Wall Street lawyers and had powerful connections in American politics and underheld contacts with America's corporations. The brothers were incredibly influential on Eisenhower, who

"made his initial decisions on covert action in private conversations with the Dulles brothers. Typically, Allen spoke to Foster with a proposal for an operation, and Foster spoke to the President over a cocktail in the Oval Office" (Weiner, 87).

It must be stressed here that Eisenhower held "ultimate authority" in his cabinet, but as will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the Dulles brothers, Henderson, Bedell Smith, and Churchill might have been more influential in shaping what Eisenhower would do regarding Iran. In the next chapter, the motivation behind the 1953 coup will be discussed based on Leffler's principle. Furthermore, the role of the CIA in Iran and its significance for the implementation of Eisenhower's foreign policy will be further constructed to understand why the coup had been deemed necessary.

Chapter 3: Justifying the Coup Based on Leffler's Principle, and the Role of the CIA

The Eisenhower administration had significant interests at stake in Iran, as discussed in Chapter Two. Marsh sums this up as the following:

“At stake for the United States in the oil crisis were relations with its premier Cold War ally, oil supplies, Middle Eastern defense, the protection of Iran against Communism and, for a limited period, the potential for escalation into confrontation with the Soviet Union” (82).

Three main arguments are discernable: oil, Communism, and strategy. But to understand how these factors played a role in the justification of the Eisenhower administration for the coup, it is imperative to set out what role the CIA played, what its objectives were, and what the main operations were in Iran.

How was the CIA used to Facilitate the Coup on Mossadeq?

A successful coup cannot happen overnight. Extensive planning is necessary to depose a political leader successfully. The same goes for Operation AJAX, the secret name of the operation within the CIA³. While Operation AJAX has been extensively investigated, a crucial part of the Iranian operation is often forgotten: Operation (TP)BEDAMN.⁴ The operation started under the Truman administration in 1948, and its primary goal was to investigate the Soviet influence on the Tudeh party and Iran. The activities that the CIA was authorized to undertake by NSC 10/2 were later expanded by NSC 5412/1 in 1955, yet the

³ For an extensive analysis of the coup, see Bayandor, Bill, Byrne, Gasiorowski (1987, 2013), Ghazvinian, Kinzer, Koch, and Roosevelt.

⁴ Most of the documents that detail the significance of Operation BEDAMN are still unavailable to the broader public, yet Roosevelt, Ghazvinian, and Gasiorowski (1987, 1991, 2013, 2019) provide somewhat of a framework.

specifics were by then already undertaken. Jeffrey-Jones sums up the authorized covert actions as the following in which the CIA was allowed to partake:

“Propaganda, political action; economic warfare; escape and evasion and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states or groups including assistance to underground movements, guerillas and refugee liberation groups; support of indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world; deception plans and operations; and all activities compatible with this directive necessary to accomplish the foregoing” (83).

Operation BEDAMN was initially set up to be an intelligence-gathering operation that investigated the Soviet influence on the Iranian Tudeh Party, but the intelligence network eventually became utilized to undermine the stability of the Iranian political scene. It undertook the following operations: destabilizing and undermining popular support of the National Front party and the Tudeh party; spreading American and anti-SU and Tudeh Party propaganda; bribing Iranian politicians to have them oppose Mossadeq; turning pro-Mossadeq or Tudeh rallies violent, and a variety of other activities (Ambrose & Immerman, 206-212; Etges, 502; Gasiorowski, 1987, 261-281; 1991, 52-80; 2014, 4-24; Ghazvinian 192-194).

Operation AJAX was not an original idea of the Eisenhower administration: it had been supplied to them by the British. MI6 official Woodhouse had met up with Kermit Roosevelt (chief of Middle Eastern operations), Allen Dulles, and Frank Wisner (the head of covert operations in the CIA) to discuss the need for a coup (Zahrani, 95). He was told to wait until Eisenhower was inaugurated, as he would be more open to the idea than Truman (Balaghi, 86; Bill, 82-85; Gasiorowski, 1991, Ghazvinian, 190-192; Etges, 500). AJAX was successful, taking less than a week to achieve the required results, but much of the operation had almost gone awry. According to Cline, the coup “was a unique case of supplying just the right bit of

marginal assistance in the right way at the right time. Such is the nature of covert political action” (132).

Considering Eisenhower’s “Fixed principles,” How Legitimate was the Coup?

Eisenhower’s administration believed that the actions undertaken in Iran were justified in the context of American national security interests in the region. Several scholars have commented on why the Eisenhower administration would greenlight the covert operation that toppled Mossadeq, and three main arguments could be made as to why the coup was undertaken. The arguments are related to oil and American business, strategy, and foreign policy, and combatting Communism. According to Bill, the arguments for oil and Communism were not separate, but they “were interrelated and mutually reinforcing” (82).

Oil and Strategy

Would Eisenhower have intervened in Iran if there was no oil or if Iran had not been situated in its strategic location? Painter describes the necessity and crucial role of oil during the Cold War as the following:

“Control of oil played a vital role in establishing and preserving US pre-eminence in the postwar international system. Maintaining access to foreign oil, especially the vast resources of the Persian Gulf, remained a key priority of US foreign policy throughout the Cold War ... US efforts to maintain access to foreign oil led the United States not only to try to contain Soviet influence but also to oppose revolutionary nationalism in the Third World” (in Leffler & Westad, 507).

Oil and geopolitical strategy concerning Eisenhower's foreign policy are inherently linked. Authors such as McMahon, Painter and particularly Marsh have investigated the significance of oil in the justification of the coup. They agree that the British played a major role in the Iranian oil conflict, particularly in the role of AIOC and the nationalization claims of Mossadeq. The British saw their access to oil as not only of economic significance but also of strategic importance: without access to cheap oil within the region, their influence would dissolve in the Middle East and their domestic financial situation would be drastically impacted (Painter in Leffler & Westad, 496-501). Iran's strategic position along the southern border of the Soviet Union and its central position between the Far East and the Middle East might also have played a key role in the containment policies of Eisenhower. Iran was part of the so-called "periphery." It was situated in a geopolitical strategic position, a key to the strongpoint defense tactic employed first by Truman, who deemed it necessary to "build self-confident centers of power along the periphery of the Soviet sphere" (Gaddis, 58-64, 71; Leffler, 150).

Truman and later Eisenhower feared that the nationalization strategy of Mossadeq would potentially destabilize the international oil market. The tactic under Truman was to maintain stability in the oil market. Eisenhower deemed it crucial to his foreign strategy to have access to foreign, Third World resources, as in the case of Iran, an open market and cheaper access to Iranian oil would secure the American position in the region. If Iran fell and became part of the Soviet sphere of influence, then others would follow and more than 60% of the oil reserves would be in Soviet hands (Gasiorowski, 1991, 67; McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 300-301; Leffler, 145; Weiner, 96). This coincides with the fear that Great Britain would lose their influence in the Middle East and that the Soviets would increase their influence in the region. Overseas commercial expansion should also be weighed into this argument, as Lafeber argues that the "Western power had 'deteriorated' and if action wasn't

taken, the Arabs would become neutral in an East-West conflict and susceptible to communist thinking” (1976, 157-159; Bill, 82, 90-94; Marsh, 80-93).

Truman, before Eisenhower, had started to consider an alternative to the democratic nationalism of Mossadeq and other countries, as his cabinet started to investigate the possibility of how beneficial pro-Western dictatorships with democratic tendencies would be compared to the current status quo. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations feared that Iran would become a pro-Communist dictatorship. These dictatorships would go against Eisenhower’s core values, as

“Communist dictatorships suppressed precisely those freedoms Ike and his comrades in arms had fought to defend – freedom of speech, of the press, of religion, of economic enterprise, and of personal movement” (Ambrose & Immerman, 158-159).

When considering this argument and applying the national security principle of Leffler, the following could be stated about the oil argument: an open market and cheaper access to Iranian oil would secure the American position in the region and be a display of power against the Soviet Union. American interests would be better defended against the Soviets if the United States had more access to natural resources, boosting the economy and guaranteeing “the growth of American multinational corporations” in the region (Leffler, 146-147).

Furthermore, regarding national security considerations of the Eisenhower administration, the coup was necessary to prevent further economic deterioration under the Mossadeq regime. It was essential to the Eisenhower administration to prevent Iran from becoming a breeding ground for Communist thinking. The administration thus needed to ensure the economic stability of Iran (Ambrose & Immerman, 199; Marsh, 90-110. Iran's strategic location and its vast oil reserves were pivotal to Eisenhower's foreign policy, positioning the country as a potentially valuable ally in the Middle East, alongside Israel, on the southern border of the Soviet Union. A coup to remove Mossadeq thus becomes necessary for the Eisenhower

administration to ensure their access to Third World resources and oil, and to prevent the Soviets from doing something similar.

Communism

McCarthyism and the fear of a Communist takeover seem to have been major factors influencing Eisenhower's foreign policy, as it was not only a campaign promise to go hard on Communism, but the administration also feared potential repercussions from the Senator's media presence. McCarthyism was at its political high tide during the first year of the Eisenhower administration and should be considered a major factor in how the Eisenhower administration dealt with potential foreign Communist threats (Branyan & Larsen, 3-18; Fried, 2-190; Lafeber, 1976, 140-151).

There is a discrepancy between authors on the communist threat that Mossadeq and the oil crisis posed to American foreign interests. This argument is perhaps the most important of all. Constructivism and the national security framework require a look at domestic issues and foreign elements that threaten American national security interests. Four elements then jump out that influenced Eisenhower's decision-making on the Communist threat that was supposedly present in Iran: the death of Stalin in March 1953, the high tide of McCarthyism, campaign promises made to strike harder against Communism, and the framing of Mossadeq as a Communist. The administration campaigned on the notion that the Democratic party had been "soft on Communism," and they were determined to prevent Iran from becoming a Korea or second China (Ghazvinian, 190-191). This argument was stressed by Woodhouse, an MI6 agent working in Iran, during his visit to Washington in November 1952. This begs the question: how high was the Communist threat in Iran?

A variety of sources state that the American press deemed Mossadeq “a tyrannical demagogue,” and allied to the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party, the Iranian Communist party and this perception was continued even until 2006 when Mossadeq was painted as “procommunist” by Samuels and a hyper fanatical Nationalist dependent on Tudeh Party and Soviet Support by Marsh. Brands went so far as to claim that Mossadeq had hated the Shah (Bill, 56-57; Brands, 36; Gaddis, 140; Ghazvinian, 192-193; Gasiorowski, 2019, 194-211; Marsh, 92-94; Samuels, 231). Cline, Roosevelt, and others stated another part of Mossadeq’s alleged persona, by describing him as an eccentric and weak political figure, and that he would wear pajamas to policy meetings while being linked to an IV drip and being quick to cry (131-132; Balaghi, 87; Bill, 53-55). As previously mentioned regarding the arguments on strategy and oil, if Iran were to fall under Soviet influence, the U.S. would not only lose access to Iranian oil reserves but also a crucial geopolitical ally in the strategic Middle East. Eisenhower feared that the nationalization policies and nationalist tendencies of Mossadeq would breed economic instability, which would enforce pro-Communist sentiments in the country. The growing strength of the Tudeh Party and Mossadeq’s growing dependence on its support, combined with Mossadeq seeking out Soviet financial aid, worried the Eisenhower administration. Considering Leffler’s national security principle, the coup can be seen as a preemptive strike to prevent the spread of Communism, asserting the pro-active form of containment under the Eisenhower administration. The fall of Iran to Communism would have massively altered the balance of power in the Cold War. The installation of a pro-Communist dictatorship would have violated Eisenhower’s core values on freedom, security of one’s nation, secure peace for all, and economic freedom, and threatened the exertion of power, as their military and political power is, according to Leffler, inherently linked to a country’s economic potential and power (Leffler, 145-151; Eisenhower; Gaddis, 55-158;

McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 288-301; Marsh, 79-95; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 486-507).

Why utilize the CIA for the Coup?

The previous chapter mentioned how Eisenhower became interested in the CIA as a tool to execute foreign policy. The operation in Italy proved that minimal funding could achieve maximized results, and Eisenhower had campaigned against the increased expenditures of the Truman administration. For only a million dollars, Italy had been “saved from Communism (Ambrose & Immerman, 166-168). Furthermore, Eisenhower tried to avoid a direct confrontation and feared a conventional war with the Soviet Union. He had been informed through Operation Solarium that the Soviet threat had been increasing and it would become increasingly difficult to peacefully coexist with the Soviet Union (McMahon in Leffler & Westad, 290-293; Jeffreys-Jones, 80-88; LaFeber, 1976, 140-152). Cline states that “the link between Presidential authority and central intelligence is, for good or ill, crucial” (109). Eisenhower did not want to deploy American troops into a conventional war in Iran to further American interests, fearing Soviet retaliation and repercussions. This could be prevented through the CIA’s clandestine capabilities. Operation BEDAMN’s network was deeply integrated in Iran and was run almost exclusively through the Rashidian brothers and other local Iranian operatives. Operation AJAX was to utilize this network and subvert it against Mossadeq. It had been directives under NSC 10/2 and would later be reaffirmed under NSC 5412/1, that the “support of indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world” was central to how the CIA under Eisenhower operated (Jeffreys-Jones, 83). Another factor to consider is that the U.S. desperately needed reliable allies that border the Soviet Union. “The American interest was not to dominate other power centers itself, but to see to it that no one else did either,” and rather than depending on a nationalist

and potential ally to the Soviet Union, the Eisenhower administration wanted the CIA to depose of Mossadeq in favor of a reliable ally in the Shah. Furthermore, by overthrowing the Mossadeq cabinet, the U.S. strengthened its ties with Britain, in exchange, American businesses received a 40 percent stake in the Iranian oil fields (Gaddis, 58-158; Gasiorowski, 1991, 64-110; Jeffreys-Jones, 85-89; Marsh, 80-88; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 486-507; Zahrani, 94-97).

Plausible Deniability and (In)Experience

Another key factor to consider is the notion of plausible deniability. The set-up of BEDAMN and AJAX was such that the American government could deny their involvement in the operations, even if the operations failed or linked plots were discovered (Gasiorowski, 2013, 4-24; Ghazvinian, 190-196; Jeffreys-Jones, 77-86). According to Cline, “cover is essential for support of legitimate foreign intelligence operations,” as “secrecy is required to prevent unauthorized people from discovering intelligence methods” (228-233). The plausible deniability was not even damaged by Kermit Roosevelt’s memoir when it was published in 1976. It would take until 2013 before the CIA would confirm its role in the 1953 coup, even though the State Department had confirmed U.S. involvement in the 1953 coup in 2000 (Byrne; Jeffreys-Jones, 77-86; Koch; Risen). Operation Ajax was a success, and it was later revealed that it had only cost about 100,000 USD, which confirmed to the Eisenhower administration that it was cheaper than perhaps expected (Ambrose & Immerman, 190-214; Balaghi, 72-74; Roosevelt, 1-166).

Considering the arguments stated earlier, it should not be surprising that the CIA executed Operation AJAX. Mossadeq could be a long-term liability, and keeping a potentially pro-Communist leader in power in Iran would not only contest Eisenhower’s core values, but

also jeopardize American foreign interests regarding strategy, Communism, and the economy. However, the arguments made previously contain significant flaws that flip the entire perspective on whether the coup on Mossadeq would have jeopardized or endangered American interests. The coup's justification can be considered flawed, and the fallacies will be outlined in the next chapter. Furthermore, has President Eisenhower been objective in his reasoning for the coup, or has he been influenced by members of his administration and misled through falsified information? What will Eisenhower's legacy be when the reasoning behind the coup turns out to be not only working against American national security and foreign interests but also counterproductive in the long term? These questions will be investigated in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: A Flawed Justification: Providing a Different Perspective

The information presented in the previous chapter does not paint the entire picture and might even be counterintuitive. This chapter sets out to show the fallacies that lie in the arguments used to justify the 1953 coup and what effect this will have on the legacy of President Eisenhower. This chapter will present a case that Eisenhower had perhaps not been informed adequately and that even if the President held ultimate authority within his cabinet, members of his cabinet, specifically the Dulles brothers and key officials such as Kermit Roosevelt and ambassador Loy Henderson, might have manipulated not only the information presented to Eisenhower but the surrounding events at large.

Outsider Influence

Even though Gaddis claims that Eisenhower held “ultimate authority” in his cabinet, he still was surrounded by figures that held considerably antagonistic positions to Communism, with those figures being the Dulles brothers and General Walter Bedell “Beetle” Smith (129; Bill, 82-94; Cline, 108-111). Woodhouse had stressed the Communist threat over the oil argument. Woodhouse recounted his visit to Washington in his book *Something Ventured* where he

“decided to emphasize the Communist threat to Iran rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry. I argued that even if a settlement of the oil dispute could be negotiated with Mussadeq, which was doubtful, he was still incapable of resisting a coup by the Tudeh Party if it were backed by Soviet support. Therefore he must be removed” (in Balaghi, 86).

From November 1952 to January 1953, the British fed the Americans faulty reports on Mossadeq, shaping the opinion of the departments further (Ghazvinian, 190-191). Did

Eisenhower then allow a coup to take place based on the limited information that was presented to him? Ambrose stated in Eisenhower's biography that he was only briefed orally, that he received no reports, and was not even involved in the meetings that set up AJAX, only being updated on what was happening through John Foster Dulles, who himself was heavily in favor of the operation and stoutly more anti-Communist than the President (1984, 111). It should be noted that "individuals in groups often do not share and use information effectively in advising leaders or reaching collective decisions," and this could lead to incorrect presidential decision-making (Janis qt. by Hult & Walcott in Edwards & Howell, 533). Considering Ambrose's remark, Eisenhower has probably depended too much on "single information channels," and failed "to probe the premises on which advice is based" (George qtd. by Hult & Walcott in Edwards & Howell, 532). These single information channels have probably been manipulated by Henderson, the Dulles brothers, Smith, and Roosevelt to suit their wishes.

It should be noted that the Dulles brothers maintained strong relationships with the "Seven Sisters," the largest oil companies in the United States. Where John Foster could be Eisenhower's trustee to inform him of covert operations, Allen perhaps influenced the President indirectly through the CIA. Allen had a strong influence on domestic publishing, and he had journalists such as Kenneth Love writing faulty, incorrect anti-Mossadeq stories in newspapers such as the *New York Times* and influential magazines such as *Time* magazine. Love had also assisted in Operation BEDAMN and AJAX by writing biased, anti-Mossadeq articles for the newspapers in Teheran (Etges, 498-508). These newspaper articles were then presented to Eisenhower, to sway him to "do something" about the Prime Minister and perceived Communist threat (Ghazvinian, 192-193). Allen Dulles pulled the strings to have the Agency's noses pointed the same way. In 1952, the CIA chief of operations in Teheran and Iran at the time, Goiran, was opposed to Operation AJAX. Why would the US support British

traditional colonialism when the arguments in Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" speech of inalienable rights were made? Allen Dulles recalled Goiran from his position in Iran and installed Henderson, who was in on the operation. Goiran warned that Operation AJAX would harm American foreign interests in the long term (Weiner, 96-97). One final factor that needs to be underlined is that Allen might have wanted to be associated with the CIA and actively tried to shape the Agency's image. Cline stated that "romantic gossip about the 'coup' in Iran spread around Washington like wildfire. Allen Dulles basked in the glory of the exploit without ever confirming or denying the extravagant impression of CIA's power that it created" (132).

Goiran's replacement and eventual ambassador Henderson was as much an anti-Communist as the Dulles brothers and had stated multiple times to the Eisenhower administration that, between his appointment and the 1953 coup, Mossadeq was relying on extremist forces and street rabble for support, and that Iran was perhaps not ready to become democratic. (Ambrose & Immerman, 196; Gasiorowski, 1991, 67-80). He also claimed that the nationalization was a measure counterproductive to the basic interests of Iran, Great Britain, and the United States, and that "acts of this kind tended to undermine the mutual trust that was necessary if international trade was to flourish" (Henderson in Ambrose & Immerman, 197). He had tried to urge the Eisenhower administration on multiple occasions to start a coup, all the while being in on Operation AJAX from the start. Churchill's personal influence on Eisenhower should also not be underestimated. The President saw the Prime Minister as a close friend and Churchill, according to Balaghi, had been pivotal in convincing Eisenhower to greenlight the covert operation (Balaghi, 71-74; Bill, 53-94; Brands, 38-46; Etges, 499-504; Zahrani, 93-97). The individual influence of these figures on Eisenhower perhaps shaped the way the President thought about what would be right in the situation.

Communism

The argument on Communism is, as reported in the previous chapter, the most important one. The Eisenhower administration believed that the coup was justified under the banner of political instability and a perceived Communist threat, but how much of the political instability had been the cause of the BEDAMN operation and American propaganda? As mentioned earlier, Operation BEDAMN was at first set up to investigate the Soviet influence on the Iranian Tudeh Party. Before Eisenhower's installation as President, Operation BEDAMN and the CIA operated somewhat autonomously. BEDAMN's goal slowly became subverted and used for other means. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, unbeknownst to Truman, the Operation went as far as to undermine Truman's foreign policy of supporting Mossadeq, further destabilizing the political scene (Gasiorowski, 1991, 52-80; Ghazvinian, 192-194). The Operation expanded its activities to not only publish anti-Tudeh and anti-Soviet propaganda but to also discredit Mossadeq, bribing politicians and religious leaders to oppose the Prime Minister and further destabilizing the already unstable political situation.⁵ Even though Marsh claims that Truman wanted to dispose of Mossadeq, other authors have commented that Truman saw no political alternative who had as much public support as Mossadeq. Truman reasoned that some of the blame should also be pointed at the British. Truman saw that further destabilization would foster pro-Communist sentiments (Etges, 498-501). There seems to have been considerable overlap between AJAX and BEDAMN, and Gasiorowski states that

“CIA officials decided to turn this network against Mosaddeq, using its propaganda capabilities to undermine popular support for him before and after the coup and

⁵ See Bayandor, Gasiorowski (1987; 2013; 2019), Ghazvinian, Koch, and Roosevelt for a detailed description of the political subversion in the period between 1947 and August 1953.

redirecting its political-action personnel to help implement the coup itself” (2019, 185).

The political instability that resulted from these activities was then referenced by the officials and fed rumors that a Communist takeover was imminent, or that Mossadeq would be a bloody dictator under Soviet control. Henderson at the time had claimed the same to the Eisenhower administration, claiming that the country would have become a bloody dictatorship under Soviet control (Ambrose & Immerman, 199; Bill, 82-94; Brands, 36; Ghazvinian, 192-204; Gasiorowski, 1991, 54-76; 2013, 4-24; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 498-500; Weiner, 99-101).

Disinformation Persisting

In the decades following the coup and before the confirmation of the American role in the coup and the declassification of the CIA documents, the image of Mossadeq remained negative. Authors such as Brands went so far as to claim that Mossadeq had hated the Shah, but these claims were later proven to have been part of British and American propaganda, as he did not want to dispose of the man who had granted him the right to rule the country (Gasiorowski, 1991, 70-76; Ghazvinian, 196-197). Cline and Roosevelt’s remarks on the appearance of Mossadeq were nothing but colored accounts and rephrased propaganda, as the Prime Minister was not the demagogue or the weak politician they made him out to be (131-132; Balaghi, 87; Bill, 53-55).

Returning to the issue of Communism, Gasiorowski (2019) outlines the communist threat in Iran extensively in his 2019 study, where he concludes that the threat was not only exaggerated but misplaced (217-221). Mossadeq had shown in previous years that he opposed and despised the Tudeh party, and according to Ghazvinian, he was “a Western-educated

aristocrat with ‘no reason to be attracted to socialism or Communism’” (192). He had purged the army and government officials who were affiliated with the Tudeh party from prominent positions and had tried to limit the amount of influence the pro-Communist party had in the political scene of Iran (Ghazvinian, 191-192; Gasiorowski, 2019, 202-218). At no point do the intelligence reports of the CIA during the period between 1952 and 1954 mention that Mossadeq was prone to be overthrown by the Tudeh party or buckling to Soviet influence. The most important thing to consider here is that objectivity is a crucial factor in how these reports are conveyed. An intelligence report “tries to reduce the inevitable degree of uncertainty to a minimum in making calculations about future situations,” and “must be tailored both for the purpose they are intended to serve and the audience they are intended to reach” (Cline, 136). Cline furthermore states that an intelligence report is the “best single integrated judgement of professional intelligence officers experienced and disciplined in making estimate judgements” (139).

The reports state that, even when Iran was in political turmoil, Mossadeq was going to stay in power, even when his influence was waning. The reports and estimates stated that Mossadeq would remain in power for at least another year, despite the socio-political turmoil that had persisted in Iran. The reports determined that Mossadeq still had some feasible support among the Iranian population (CIA, *Current Intelligence Bulletin*, 20 Jun. 1953; *Current Intelligence Bulletin*, 6 Nov. 1953; *Current Intelligence Review*; *Probable Developments in Iran in 1952*; *Probable Developments in Iran through 1954*; *Soviet Union Offers to Settle Iranian Financial Claims*; *The Central Intelligence Agency and the Fall of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq, August 1953*; *The Situation in Iran*; *Tudeh Party Comparison of Events*). Considering the information that is presented, the decision to allow the coup on the premise of Communism is problematic, and perhaps even impulsive,

and “if the coup against Mossadegh was intended to prevent a Communist takeover, it was premature at best” (Gasiorowski, 2019).

Oil and Strategy

The argument made by Painter, Marsh, and others on the necessity of oil is somewhat difficult to relay. On the one hand, the argument holds regarding the geopolitical position of Iran, its oil reserves, and the potential for Iran to fall under Soviet influence, while on the other hand, the argument falls apart if Britain is left out of the equation and Aramco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the increase of American domestic oil production is considered. Before the nationalization by Mossadeq, Aramco had secured a 50/50 oil agreement in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Iranians had wanted to see a concession on a similar level as this agreement, but the British would not consider this option. After the nationalization, Henderson had stressed to the Americans that Mossadeq would start falling under Soviet influence and that the Americans would lose their access to the Iranian oil market. However, Mossadeq was not willing to sell oil to the Soviet Union, and he certainly did not want to provide them with concessions or access to Iranian oil (Ghazvinian, 192). He wanted to nationalize the AIOC, as it was a matter of sovereignty and independence, especially when this idea is contrasted to how little the Iranians benefitted from their agreement with the British (Gasiorowski, 1991, 48-60; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 494-501; Zahrani, 95-99) Mossadeq wanted to use the Americans to pressure the British in conceding in the oil debate, but to no avail. The British were, according to Mossadeq, “subverting Iranian politics in the pursuit of oil profits” (Brands, 36-39). Painter argues that the embargo and the British-American meddling in Iranian politics caused polarization, which then fueled the idea of an imminent Communist takeover (in Leffler & Westad, 497-501). Marsh’s arguments in his article can work two-fold, as the embargo caused the American oil companies to increase their output to stabilize the

international oil market, something Truman and Eisenhower deemed imperative in their foreign policy (80-93). This, alongside the Aramco deal with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, would devalue the importance of oil for the Americans in the Iranian conflict, as the Americans were not only importers of oil at the time, but also major exporters. The access to Iranian oil would “force them to reduce production elsewhere, potentially creating tensions with the Saudis and Kuwaitis” (Zahrani, 93-96).

The Americans thought that Iran had the potential to become a second China. The only reasonable measures that the Eisenhower administration could have considered to allow a coup to take place were to appease and help a crucial ally in Great Britain to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to Iranian oil. By getting rid of Mossadeq and installing the Shah, a “pro-Western and anti-Communist government was installed,” ensuring access to the Iranian oil reserves and guaranteeing a strong ally on the Soviet border (Etges, 497; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 496-506). This would fit the strong point tactic of containment. Iranian oil had been much more important to the British than to the Americans. It can be assumed that the Eisenhower administration did the British a favor by overthrowing Mossadeq. According to Gaddis, the “chief American interest in the world was access to the world, and that in turn required a world of at least minimal congeniality” (Ambrose & Immerman, 195-212; Gaddis, 58-158; Ghazvinian, 190-202; Etges, 496-503; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 496-506; Zahrani, 93-97).

Ambrose claims that it was Eisenhower and his cabinet’s resolve to prevent something similar from happening to Iran as had happened to China: “Who lost Iran” was a question to be prevented (& Immerman, 199-200). Brands sums up the argument of how the Eisenhower administration approached the coup: “for the United States government it was a ‘damned-if-we-do, damned-if-we-don’t’ business. Washington ought to at least get some good out of all the blaming – such a more stable government than Mossadeq’s” (43). It would be somewhat

counterintuitive to dispose of Mossadeq on the grounds of economic and political instability and the Communist threat when the threat was overstated and the instability was due to the American and British covert operations (Marsh, 88-102; Jeffreys-Jones, 88-90). The Eisenhower administration seems to have forgotten one crucial aspect of its covert operations as lined out in NSC 10/2 & 5412/1, namely the “support of *indigenous* and anti-Communist elements in threatened countries of the free world,” often confusing Nationalism with Communism or independence struggles for Communist subversion (Jeffreys-Jones, 85; Marsh, 79-88; Gasiorowski, 2013, 4-13).

The argument then becomes somewhat self-serving and circular. The Eisenhower administration deemed it imperative to prevent a Communist takeover in a strategic location and to save the country from political instability and a Communist demagogue, while covertly undermining the political stability and actively perpetuating the chaos in the country. It can be assumed that Eisenhower wished to perhaps appease a close ally, Great Britain, to ensure its strong position in Europe, and was willing to dispose of Mossadeq to ensure their support (Brands, 44-46; Gaddis, 56-134; Gasiorowski, 1991, 52-58; Marsh, 82-88; Jeffreys-Jones, 89; Painter in Leffler & Westad, 486-497; Zahrani, 93-99).

Role of the CIA and Plausible Deniability

Why then would Eisenhower utilize the CIA to orchestrate the coup? The CIA is not an organization that works independently from the President and the American government. Andrew quotes a Congressional report that stated that the organization is “utterly responsive to the instructions of the President and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs,” and it would otherwise have more influence and power over those that it dislikes or deems as major threats to American national security (in Leffler & Westad, 424). Operation

AJAX was not an easy success. One problem that the CIA had to deal with was that it had no intelligence on the Iranian military situation and no roster of the Iranian army. They did not know who would and would not support Zahedi (Weiner, 99). Another part of the criticism of what happened after the coup is that “inevitably, covert ops ... took precedence over intelligence collection ... the irresistible tendency in the CIA has been to concentrate on the sensational covert action rather than the practical, but far more important, task of collecting and analyzing information” (Ambrose & Immerman, 167).

The argument of plausible deniability comes into view when Eisenhower’s reluctance to be involved in clandestine operations is considered. As stated earlier, he wanted as little of a paper trail as possible to be able to deny any American involvement in foreign operations, as he feared that American involvement could trigger the Soviets into retaliating. Balaghi quotes Thomas and states the following on plausible deniability:

“In the wake of the Korean War, the Eisenhower administration was looking to scale back the military budget, and ‘The CIA beckoned as a promising alternative. It was small, relatively cheap, elite, nonbureaucratic, and best of all for a political leader, deniable’” (73).

The main strategy of the Eisenhower administration was that “the United States must take advantage of the present situation not only to ‘contain’ the Soviet sphere but to reduce it, seizing and maintaining the initiative in all fields” (Gaddis, 68). The CIA’s main objective is that it is to be an “instrument of policy, not an instigator” (Cline, 103) Cline states that the true fallacy of covert action is that a “single misfortune that reveals CIA’s connection makes it necessary for the United States either to abandon the cause completely or convert to a policy of overt military intervention” (qt. in Andrew in Leffler & Westad, 422-424). The BEDAMN network was thus crucial for the success of Operation AJAX and keeping plausible deniability intact for the Eisenhower administration: since the network was built with local forces, the

CIA had a potential opt-out and Eisenhower held plausible deniability as a result. Another argument that could be considered is that at that time, the CIA had no prior experience with large-scale covert operations and was inexperienced as an intelligence agency compared to the British. A lot of elements that were implemented in Guatemala were tested and executed in Iran. Operation AJAX had been drafted as Operation Boot and the CIA depended heavily on the intelligence operations of close allies to achieve its policy goals (Cline, 120-18).

Operation AJAX was “a fatal catalyst for other interventions of the CIA,” yet the success of AJAX had blinded the CIA to what it had done wrong. Major issues weren’t addressed, and short-term solutions were preferred by Allen Dulles and the CIA, without carefully considering the long-term indications (Etges, 506-508). The CIA could pull off covert operations cheaply, and Operation AJAX proved this to the Eisenhower administration.

Even though the approach and reasoning might have been flawed, the fact of the matter is that Eisenhower consented to overthrow a democratically elected Prime Minister, perhaps under the false notion of a heightened Communist threat, or the notion of saving the Iranian oil fields from falling under Communist control.

Conclusion

To return to the research question, President Eisenhower thought that the coup was justified under the notion that by pre-emptively removing Mossadeq and installing the Shah, an imminent Communist takeover by the Soviet-backed Tudeh Party could be prevented. This thesis has indicated that this justification does not paint the full picture and contains flaws. Eisenhower's top-down decision making has been influenced by bottom-up factors manipulating the situation in Iran and the information presented to him. The Communist threat had been overstated by key members of Eisenhower's administration and the CIA, i.e. the Dulles brothers, Loy Henderson, General Bedell Smith, and Kermit Roosevelt. The BEDAMN network had been subverted from its original intelligence gathering goal to manipulate events in Iran that undermined and deteriorated the socio-political circumstances in Iran. Mossadeq, who had opposed the Tudeh Party and Soviet influence and wanted a better oil deal with the British, was most definitely not in danger of falling to a Communist take-over.

The CIA, through BEDAMN and later AJAX, began to actively undermine Mossadeq and deteriorated his domestic support and the socio-political circumstances through covert means. Mossadeq was overthrown as he was deemed a liability who could not control the socio-political chaos in Iran. This was a piece of misinformation considering the chaos BEDAMN was causing, and the misinformation was then subsequently overstated by officials and even implemented in American newspapers, at the behest of Allen Dulles. The only logical reasons to have overthrown Mossadeq were to appease a close ally in Great Britain, break the British monopoly on Iranian oil to favor American business, and to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to an important resource. Installing a pro-Western, loyal dictator in the Shah as a strong ally on the Soviet border was deemed more favorable than supporting a democratically elected official.

The CIA was an interesting organization to consider for the President to execute foreign policy. It would be cheaper than conventional methods and the notion of plausible deniability was of real importance, as it would almost guarantee that the Eisenhower administration could pull their hands off any involvement without facing serious repercussions. The operation presented the administration with a cheap option to execute their foreign policy. If the coup worked, then they could utilize the CIA to do more of their bidding. If the operation failed, then they could choose to continue their psychological warfare operations such as Radio Free Europe, or find an alternative to implement their policy. Eisenhower might have approached the Iranian situation with what he thought was best regarding American National Security Interests. Eisenhower probably thought that the information that was presented to him was just and objective and that he made the right decision with American interests in mind. Perhaps Eisenhower consented to the coup under good intentions but when all the relevant factors and information are considered, the coup might have been premature and illogical to undertake.

Significance for Future Studies and the Academic Field

This thesis provides the academic field a few new insights that could be useful for future studies. Eisenhower's legacy has perhaps been somewhat changed, as members of his administration had more influence on his decision making. Furthermore, the coup's justification should be viewed differently after this thesis: Mossadeq was not the demagogue, nor was there any reason for the Eisenhower administration to consider overthrowing Mossadeq on the premise of Communism. The coup should be viewed as the first instance where Eisenhower could implement his cheaper and more active foreign policy directive, with the CIA as the primary executor. It could be interesting to see whether a similar intelligence network such as BEDAMN was set up in Guatemala and other countries. Considering the role

of misinformation in the decision making regarding the 1953 coup, what other coups or covert operations have utilized misinformation to further their goals. If more documents are declassified and released, it could be interesting to investigate how an intelligence network gets set up or if the CIA has been involved in other countries. The dynamic between the President and the CIA and how their approach to executing foreign policy through the CIA differed from Eisenhower's can be investigated further in future studies. Finally, this thesis provides a useful way as to how a President's foreign policy can be assessed regarding Leffler's National Security Principle.

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