The Bear That Did Not Roar.

Stalin, Soviet intelligence,

and the struggle for Iran, 1945-53

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The drama of the National Front in Iran in 1951-53 occupies an important place in international history. Iran’s moves to nationalize its oil and eliminate its dependence on foreign economic interests opened a radical phase in the decolonization process in the Eastern hemisphere. Although Iran was a sovereign state, Iran’s battle for oil was widely regarded as a new and radical phase in the struggle against European colonial empires in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. It was also in Iran where the agenda of independence movements in the Third World criss-crossed for the first time with the Cold War international politics, involving the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union. The US-British collaboration during the oil crisis and their joint overthrow of the Iranian legitimate leader Dr Muhammed Mossadeq in August 1953 set a model for the US policy towards radical de-colonization and Third World nationalism for at least two decades to follow.

This article adds the Soviet dimension to these important stories. The existing literature is based on solid Western evidence, as far as the British and American motives and interests are concerned. Looming everywhere in this literature is fear of communism and Soviet expansion, not only in Iran but in the Gulf area and beyond. On this central topic documents from the US and British archives are only speculative. The British literature and documents demonstrate how the UK government used Soviet and communist threat to consolidate ‘special relations’ with the United States in the Middle East and elsewhere. [[1]](#footnote-1) The American historiography testify to the centrality of Soviet threat in American policies in Iran; the Truman Administration balanced between the desires to contain communism and to modernize the Third World in American way. [[2]](#footnote-2) The long declassified American evidence, as well as the recently published volume on American covert activities in Iran do not add much to our understanding of Soviet motives and does not help to answer the main question: how serious was Soviet and communist threat in Iran? [[3]](#footnote-3)

The Soviet intelligence estimates and diplomatic reports from Tehran provide the bulk of new evidence for this article. Among those are the reports of the Committee of Information (KI) and Molotov’s file on Iran from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) and the papers of Joseph Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov from the Russian State Archive of Contemporary Political History (RGASPI). [[4]](#footnote-4) In the absence of the minutes of top-level political discussions on Iran, this evidence is currently the best basis for conclusions on Soviet interests and motives in Iran.

The new evidence, presented in the article, shows that the Soviet Union was at no point planning a communist takeover in Iran, and the assets controlled by Iranian communists were significant, but insufficient for a take-over of power. The Soviet estimates of Iran, explored in the article, allow for the first time to look at developments in Iran in 1944-53 from Moscow’s perspective as a continuum, instead of a set of episodes treated separately. Thereby the article brings the understudied Soviet agency to the study of not only Iranian political and economic history, but also to the broader story of the Cold War and decolonization in the Third World. Most importantly, this article argues that Stalin’s failed attempt to gain access to Iranian oil in 1944-46 [[5]](#footnote-5) had led to the firm and lasting Soviet assumption that Iran became the zone of the Anglo-American interests, off limits for Moscow’s ambitions; this shaped Soviet attitude towards the National Front government. The article also argues that in 1951-53 the Soviet leaders and diplomats were not prepared to exploit opportunities presented by the National Front. The Iranian oil nationalization was regarded by the Soviet leadership not in the context of decolonization, but in the context of the British-American competition for oil resources. Dr Mosaddeq, in their eyes, was an increasingly reckless gambler, who leaned toward the United States. A genuine national-liberation movement in Iran, Soviet leaders and experts assumed, could only emerge under the Soviet sponsorship, and that was clearly impossible in Iran in 1951-53. The Soviet documentation corroborates the Iranian evidence that Mosaddeq rejected an alliance with the Soviets and their Iranian agents during the decisive days of August 1953. It was Mossadeq’s misguided belief that the United States would have to back him against the British, that contributed to his defeat and collapse of the National Front and the establishment of American hegemony in Iran. [[6]](#footnote-6)

The evidence in this article confirms the view that the United States was the first and early architect of the Cold War politics in the Middle East. [[7]](#footnote-7) The Soviet foreign policy in Iran after 1946 was reactive and passive, seeking to avoid new conflicts with the United States. Only a decade later, largely because of Kremlin’s succession politics after Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s intensely ideological personality, Moscow would make a sudden, and by no means preordained turn towards the support of non-communist national-liberation movements. [[8]](#footnote-8)

This article also speaks to the literature on the lasting failure of Iran’s secular national movements. [[9]](#footnote-9) The Soviet evidence helps better understand domestic and international constraints under which the National Front operated. In particular it concerns the role of the Tudeh, the party established with Soviet support in 1941 and infiltrated by Iranian communists and agents, who operated under direct control of the Azerbaijan communist leadership in Baku. That party was outlawed in Iran since 1949 yet continued to enjoy support among broad swathes of Iranian intelligentsia, middle class, and workers. [[10]](#footnote-10) The article demonstrates, however, that this asset for secular democratic politics in Iran was compromised and wasted, due to Anglo-American interests and Soviet calculations.

**Stalin’s “Loss” of Iran**

Before the Cold War, Soviet-Iranian relations were shaped by security concerns and interests, and increasingly by the importance of oil. In 1919-20, Stalin had been personally involved in supporting a separatist movement in the pre-Caspian Iranian province Gilan. This affair failed, and after losing this revolutionary beachhead, Moscow agreed to sign the Iranian-Soviet Treaty of 1921. This treaty cancelled all previous mutual territorial and financial (mostly Russian) claims and (mostly Iranian) obligations. The treaty’s Article 6 allowed both sides to help each other restore control over its territory or assist against a military intervention by a third party. The treaty allowed Iran to regain its balancing act in international relations, defending its independence from Great Britain and the pressure of Western oil companies. [[11]](#footnote-11) Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the unexpected Soviet alliance with the United Kingdom destroyed old rules and constraints. In September of 1941 the Soviet Union, jointly with the British, occupied Iran, overthrew the Shah and installed his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to the Peacock Throne. Joseph Stalin saw a combination of the corrupt oligarchic Mejlis, the Iranian parliament, and the weak shah as a historic opportunity. In 1944 he demanded the Iranian government and Majlis to grant the Soviet Union exclusive rights for oil exploration in Gilan and Mezenderan. [[12]](#footnote-12) For many educated Iranians, however, the British-Russian occupation was a return of the Russian-British colonial domination, and ignited Iranian nationalism aimed against the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The Majlis (Iranian parliament) forbade new oil agreements with foreign powers as long as foreign troops remained on the Iranian territory. Mosaddeq rushed this law through the parliament, he argued against the traditional Iranian strategy of ‘movazeneh’ or balancing, whereby the Iranians sought to maintain their independence by giving economic concessions the Great Powers and playing them off each other. [[13]](#footnote-13)

Stalin knew he would confront British and American interests in Iran, but was convinced that he could obtain what the United Kingdom already had for many years. In addition to the presence of the Soviet army, the Soviet ruler relied on proxies to promote his goals: the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) created and funded by the Soviet occupational authorities and the Kurdish nationalists. The Kremlin ruler mobilized the power of nationalism. Even the communists in the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan were driven by it: the head of that republic Mir-Jafar Bagirov believed that the Iranian Azerbaijan would in time become part of his republic within the USSR. [[14]](#footnote-14)

The pro-Soviet elements in Iran were mobilized and led by the Tudeh, that acted legally during the occupation period. The Soviet influence in Iran was at its peak, magnified by Soviet victories against Germany and Japan; even nationalist Iranian intelligentsia praised Soviet communist modernization. The People’s Party was, Iranian historians argue, the only real political party in the country: it numbered 15000 members in Tehran and up to 40000 in the country, with 355,000 blue and white collar workers in the affiliated unions, had its press, a network organizations among women, students, and intelligentsia, and had strong membership among the Iranian military. Stalin’s demand of oil concessions, however, had driven a wedge between the Iranian communists, on one hand, and the nationalist Iranian intelligentsia, who admired the Soviet Union, but turned against Soviet imperialism. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Stalin wanted to find a political strongman whom he could support against the strong pro-British forces in the Majlis and in the shah’s court. And he did not expect the United States to side with British interests in Iran and the Middle East.[[16]](#footnote-16) Stalin’s invitation for bargaining was accepted by prime minister Ahmad Qavam, who played a anti-British card, was ambitious and venal. Qavam travelled to Moscow and held negotiations with Stalin and Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov from February 19 to March 7, 1946. [[17]](#footnote-17) According to Soviet archival sources, Qavam presented to Stalin with a secret “plan”: to convene a Constituent Assembly to declare a republic or to replace the shah with another monarch, possibly a son of Ahmed Shah, the last ruler of Qajar dynasty whom Reza Pahlavi had overthrown in February 1921. Qavam, however, insisted on preliminary withdrawal of Soviet troops and the end of Azerbaijani autonomy, to satisfy Iranian nationalism. Only after that he promised to overcome the Majlis opposition to the Soviet-Iranian oil deal.[[18]](#footnote-18) Stalin knew that the Iranian politician could fool him: he pencilled on a letter from Qavam, next to his effusive assurances: “Svoloch!” [Scoundrel!] The Kremlin leader hardly took seriously Qavam’s “secret” plan; his focus was on oil and keeping the British-American interests out of northern Iran. [[19]](#footnote-19)

What followed then is a familiar narrative linked to the origins of the Cold War. [[20]](#footnote-20)Stalin decided to keep the Soviet troops beyond the deadline agreed by the Allies. This elicited unexpected American intervention, sharp British-American protest, and the prospect of an international scandal in the newly-convened United Nations. Stalin had to order the Soviet troops to begin their retreat, while continuing to press Qavam for concessions. The most surprising effect of the Iranian crisis for the Soviet leaders not even the American stand in support of Iran, but the spectre of international isolation. “We began to probe [on Iran],” Molotov recollected, “but nobody supported us.” [[21]](#footnote-21) At the same time, Stalin did not consider the military retreat as a political defeat. [[22]](#footnote-22) In April, Qavam pledged pledged to create a joint Soviet-Iranian oil company in the north of the country, where the Soviets would have 51% of the shares; he promised to put this agreement to vote in the Majlis within next seven months, after parliamentary elections.. The shah supported the deal in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador. In Baku, Azerbaijan, Mir-Jafar Bagirov praised this as a great achievement in his secret correspondence with his trusted emissaries in Tehran “We will be full masters in the Soviet-Iranian joint oil company and will have a few thousand people as workers and officials, recruited among our people. Clearly, we will recruit them among the Azeris.” [[23]](#footnote-23)

Instead, Qavam used the Soviet-American Cold War to restore central authority over Iran’s rebellious provinces and to renegue on the oil agreement. In fall 1946, the Qavam government sent the Army and the gendarmerie first against the pro-British tribes in the South, then against the Soviet-backed Azeri separatists in the North. Simultaneously, the Tudeh’s members were arrested in Teheran and other Iranian cities. On November 2, 1946, Soviet ambassador in Iran Ivan Sadchikov sent a telegram to Moscow asking for “urgent instructions [on] what we should advise to the [communist] leaders. The Tudeh grassroots cells wanted to stage a universal strike. In one more week of such passivity, Sadchikov warned, the Tudeh “would be rendered impotent and would hardly be able to mobilize all workers.” Stalin wrote back to Sadchikov: “Tell [the Tudeh] it is none of our business. We cannot interfere in the domestic affairs of Iran.” [[24]](#footnote-24) In 1957 Nikita Khrushchev recalled Stalin’s motives as follows: “Stalin presided over this affair, warmed up Bagirov, but when it began to smell powder and one had to choose between fighting [with the United States] and withdrawing, Stalin said: withdraw before it is too late…” In the fall of 1947, when Soviet-American tensions in Europe and the Mediterranean were rapidly evolving into confrontation, the re-elected Majlis formally rejected the oil deal. The Soviet authorities filed a formal protest, but otherwise did nothing. [[25]](#footnote-25)

Stalin not only “lost” Iran. What made matters worse, the Generalissimo lost to Iran, a weak and poor country. The leader with reputation of invincibility and infallibility, of course, refused to acknowledge it. Other security problems preoccupied him in Europe and Asia. The outcome of the Soviet offensive in Iran in 1944-46, however, made a lasting impact on the Soviet policies. The USSR had to satisfy its growing demands for oil by getting it from Romania and Austria, but conceded Iran and the rest of the Middle East to the British and American corporations. In the years that followed, Stalin would grow even more pessimistic about Soviet influence in the Middle East and more suspicious towards the politicians and movements in that region.

**Confronting the National Front**

In 1948-50, the Soviet-Iranian relations became frozen and tense. From the Soviet perspective, Iran was becoming a British-American protectorate. The Soviet political assets in Iran were under attack. In February 1949, after a failed attempt on the shah’s life by a Fedayen fanatic, the Majlis outlawed Tudeh. The party leaders were sentenced to death, but managed to escape to the Soviet Union. [[26]](#footnote-26) Soviet intelligence assets suffered in the process, and the Western press reported on “the Soviet spy network in Iran”. On March 1, 1950, the Iranian Ambassador in Moscow asked to recall from Tehran a Soviet Embassy’s official in charge of legal work with Iranian communists and sympathizers. [[27]](#footnote-27)

In June 1950, the shah appointed General Haj Ali Razmara as prime minister. In May 1950, Razmara signalled to Moscow that he could come to power “any time, but would be able to stay in power and conduct reforms only if some great power would provide its backing”. If “foreigners back him,” Razmara said in the presence of a Soviet informer, he would overthrow the weak shah and establish an Iranian republic. When a Soviet official asked Razmara if he would like to receive support from “democratic forces of Iran, the Soviet Union, and the countries of people’s democracy,” Razmara replied, “Future will tell.” Molotov read and underlined those words. Qavam, however, had voiced similar intentions four years earlier. And the Soviet officials remembered that in 1946 Razmara had been the chief of the shah’s general staff and had planned the operation to crush the pro-Soviet autonomy in the Iranian Azerbaijan; he also had repressed Tudeh after the shah’s failed assassination. [[28]](#footnote-28)

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 and militarization of the Cold War had strong echoes in Iran. Initially, the early successes of Kim Il Sung in Korea encourated the Tudeh leaders in exile in the USSR. In early July 1950, they wrote to the international department of the Central Committee (that was in change with foreign communists) and asked for a guidance for action in a “revolutionary situation.” The department’s officials, seconded by the Foreign Ministry, ignored this request. In October 1950, the exiled Tudeh leaders made a second attempt to reach Stalin and Molotov; they sent to the Central Committee a report titled “Historical tasks of the national-liberation movement in Iran.” The paper repeated Soviet public rhetoric of the “two camps,” the Soviet-led “democratic,” and the imperialist camp. “No third force exists,” the document concluded. [[29]](#footnote-29) In mid-November, Dr Reza Radmanesh, General Secretary of the Tudeh in exile, sent another letter to the international department requesting a meeting with the Soviet party leadership. This time the department suggested that Mikhail Suslov, Stalin’s young deputy for ideology, could meet with Radmanesh. Molotov seconded this suggestion. There is no further paperwork trail but the proposal was likely dropped. It was, after all, the moment, when Stalin’s priority was to convince the Chinese communist leadership to save the North Korean regime. Iran and the Iranian communists were peripheral and ignored. [[30]](#footnote-30) The Korean war’s unexpected turn only contributed to Stalin’s indifference towards Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran’s economy was slipping into recession. Harsh economic conditions refilled the ranks of the Tudeh and its networks. In August 1951, according to Soviet classified information, the military organization of the Tudeh had 275-300 members “under direct control of [the party’s] Central Committee”, including officers in divisions and brigades in the Northern provinces, Kermanshah in the West, Isfahan and Ahvaz in the South, the policy school, and the main department of police and gendarmerie in Tehran. The party claimed to organize 36 underground trade unions under its control, with membership growing 2500 to 6500 during 1950-51. The party’s underground youth organization reportedly had doubled its ranks up to 10,000 in the same period, and served as “a base” fr the legal Federation of Democratic Youth of Iran, active at the Teheran university and numerous other schools. The organization of women, mostly wives of workers, numbered 1613 members. The Party also claimed its role in creating a number of other legal organizations, including Society of Iranian lawyers-democrats, Society of Iranian freedom, Iran’s Society for Peace, the National Society for Struggle against Imperialism, etc. The party reputedly sponsored ten legal newspapers “under cover of democratic and progressive organizations.” [[31]](#footnote-31) It is impossible to check the accuracy of this statistics; it was not uncommon for foreign communists to exaggerate the scope of their activities in their reporting to Moscow.

Economic hardships fuelled nationalist discontent and the rise of the National Front, a broad coalition of people and interests, that demanded radical reforms and, above all, nationalization of the British-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The latter was fully under British control and sent most of its revenues to London. Razmara, who opposed nationalization, became the first casualty of the new situation: he was the target of attacks by the National Front and the shah. He failed to get massive US assistance and security guarantees. [[32]](#footnote-32) On March 7, 1951, he was assassinated by religious fanatic. The resulting power vacuum was filled by radical nationalism. The Majlis unanimously approved an act of nationalisation of AIOC and on April 29 the shah reluctantly appointed the main proponent of this act, Mosaddeq, to the post of prime minister. These developments took both the Soviet and Western diplomats and intelligence by surprise. Moscow authorities cabled to the Soviet *rezidentura* [the intelligence station] in Tehran: “Without delay and in the shortest possible period take stock of possibilities for utilizing in the interests of the USSR the nationalist-minded circles in Iran, those who amass around Mossaddeq, [the leader of Fedayan Islam Ayatollah Seyed] Kashani, [the leader of the Iranian Worker’s Party Mozaffar] Baqa’i and others, the opposition to the shah and to the Anglo-American predominance in the country.” In August, Moscow authorities sharply rebuked the station for its failure “to understand in a timely manner the growing movement in favour of oil nationalization and take advantage of it with a goal of weakening the American and British influence.” [[33]](#footnote-33)

It was not lack of information that accounted for Soviet intelligence failure. Soviet intelligence services had good sources inside the Iranian Foreign Ministry and the Army, in the shah’s and in Mosaddeq’s entourage. The Soviet services could read Iranian diplomatic traffic and intercepted the correspondence between a number of Western embassies in Tehran. The Tudeh continued to have numerous assets in the key quarters of the Iranian state and society. The information from the Tudeh networks, however, passed through ideological and political filters. Not only the Tudeh leaders, like Radmanesh, but many members of the party did not see a potential for “the third force,” such as the non-communist nationalists, in Iran. There was additional filtering when the information passed through Soviet diplomatic and intelligence bureaucracy. Ultimately, however, the biggest factor in filtering and ignoring information was Stalin’s suspiciousness. The Vozhd always valued “raw” intelligence and considered himself the best expert; only his ageing forced him to accept condensed reports from the intelligence bureaucracies, as well as analytical papers from the Committee of Information, set up after 1947.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Under Stalin’s influence, the Soviet bureaucracies harboured deep dislike of the National Front from the beginning. In the fall 1949, the Middle Eastern desk of the Foreign Ministry regarded the National Front as a band of scheming Majlis deputies, probably sponsored by the British and the Americans. The Soviet dislike of Mosaddeq was a special factor. He was described as “a big landlord,” who had made his earnings from renting out his lands and houses, “a man with a big ego,” who is “an enemy of truly friendly relations with the USSR and democratic movement in Iran.” In the Soviet biographical profile of Mosaddeq Molotov underlined the information that in December 1944, the Iranian politician had been a leader of the group that moved a “notorious bill” that blocked Soviet oil exploration in Northern Iran. [[35]](#footnote-35)

The Soviet leaders disliked Mosaddeq for what he actually was: a radical Iranian nationalist, corruption-free visionary, supporter of constitutional monarchy, a believer in a possibility of absolute independence of his country from foreign influence, and also a principled anti-communist. An aristocratic Westernizer with deep roots in the Qajar family and religious elites, Mosaddeq was a bizarre character, that puzzled and antagonized Western officials as well. The British loathed him as a demagogue. American diplomats and CIA analysts, while recognizing his political instincts, described him as an extreme nationalist and “an impractical visionary,” who punched well above his weight. [[36]](#footnote-36)

After April 1951, Soviet diplomats and intelligence focused on the Iranian-British oil dispute, the biggest crisis before 1956 where decolonization trends clashed with the Cold War agenda. The Iranian nationalization of the AIOC denied the United Kingdom a major source of dollar-denominated revenue, and threatened its financial stability. The Truman Administration viewed it as a difficult dilemma, a double threat to its Cold War strategy on containment in Western Europe and in the Middle East. The Americans decided they could not support either British intervention or Iranian nationalization; they began to mediate between them to find a compromise. [[37]](#footnote-37) In September Soviet intelligence accurately informed Moscow on the essence of the negotiations between Averell Harriman, a special envoy of the US government in Iran, and Mosaddeq. According to Soviet sources, Mosaddeq told Harriman that Iran could create an international trust company that would deal with the refining and selling of Iranian oil. The American response was that Iran would not be able run such a complex operation alone, and “has no choice but to grant concessions” to the British. [[38]](#footnote-38)

The British-Iranian conflict exacerbated after the Iranian government and the Majlis had moved to evict all British personnel from the AIOC refineries in Abadan. The British first threatened with the use of force, but then withdrew and initiated the international boycott of the Iranian oil. [[39]](#footnote-39) On September 27, Soviet intelligence incorrectly reported that “according to the British government sources” the British government “allegedly made a decision “to use British military forces” to resolve the conflict in Iran. The British, the report continued, “are now seeking not only American consent…but their military assistance.” In fact, the British government was not ready to use the force in Iran. The Truman Administration also categorically objected to the use of force, for the same reasons that would later split Washington and London during the Suez crisis of 1956. The CIA analysts were especially concerned that the USSR would be able to activate the 1921 treaty and re-introduce their troops into Iran. The Soviet sources detected the British-American tension. In early October the Soviet intelligence intercepted remarks of the US Ambassador in Moscow, Alan G. Kirk that the British policy towards Iran was “short-sighted” and that, in case of British military action, “a new and more dangerous Korea may emerge in Iran.” In response to the seizure of the Abadan refinery complex by the Iranian troops, the British government appealed to the United Nations. The Soviet diplomats had an anticipation of revenge for their humiliation in the United Nations over Iran in 1946. The US Ambassador to the United Nations reported to a State Department colleague that the Soviet emissary in the United Nations, Semyon Tsarapkin, “was smiling yesterday like a Cheshire cat” in anticipation of Soviet veto and British political fiasco. [[40]](#footnote-40)

In October-November 1951 the Soviet sources reported on the joint attempt by the US and British ambassadors to urge the shah to replace Mosaddeq. Mosaddeq already suspected the court and the shah’s family of plotting against him. According to Soviet informers, the shah told his mother (who would soon be forced by Moddadeq to go into exile in Switzerland), that he considered it wiser to leave the country than “to live here in constant fear for one’s life.” The shah’s only hope was that “a skilful plot” in the Majlis would remove Mosaddeq from power. Muhammad Reza Shah, Soviet analysts wrote, was concerned by what happened in Egypt, where public discontent was rising against King Farouk.[[41]](#footnote-41)

In October-November 1951, Mosaddeq travelled to the United States, where he defended Iran’s case in the United Nations. He wanted to convince the Truman Administration to back him against the British and provide massive financial assistance to Iran. The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged to give such assistance, so that Iran would not “pass to the domination of the USSR.” Acheson and the US diplomats, however, had interpreted Mossadeq’s demands as the traditional “Persian” style of using the Soviet card, to blackmail the West. The Americans pushed Iran to accept the fifty-fifty distribution of oil profits, taking example from the US oil companies in Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. At the same time Truman inadvertently confirmed Mosaddeq’s notion that Iranian oil had global strategic value. “Russia was sitting like a vulture on the fence,” the President said, “waiting to pounce on the oil…If the Russians secured this oil, they would then be in a position to wage a world war. They are not in a position to do so now. [[42]](#footnote-42) On the way back Mosaddeq stopped in Egypt, where the government had just abrogated the 1936 treaty with Britain on the Suez Canal. The Iranian leader received enthusiastic attention from the Egyptian elites as a leader of national liberation from Western dominance. [[43]](#footnote-43)

Mosaddeq’s foreign trips had no impact on Soviet estimates of the Iranian situation. Soviet sources in Teheran reported on the Iranian leader’s conversation with his cousin Mozaffar Firouz, who was close to the Tudeh. “Mosaddeq spoke very harshly about Americans, calling them naïve people, who ‘have absolutely no idea about Iranian affairs’.” When Firouz probed Mosaddeq “to turn for assistance to the countries of the Eastern bloc,” Mosaddeq replied that it might be possible, yet “one should wait for a while, because the time for this has not yet come.” [[44]](#footnote-44) This report was sent to Stalin, but there was no reaction. Mosaddeq’s trip to the United States and his contacts with the Americans counted for the Soviet leadership much more than words or the impact of his decolonization rhetoric on the Middle East.

When Mosaddeq’s ally Ayatollah Kashani signalled to Moscow that the government of Iran would like to sell oil to the USSR, to break up the Western embargo, both the Soviet leaders and American diplomats (who learned about this move) interpreted Iranian offers to buy Iranian oil as an attempt to use the Soviet card in order to obtain American support. Mosaddeq confirmed this interpretation when he called of a sale of oil to Czechoslovakia and Poland According to the GRU, the State Department and World Bank representatives threatened to cut off American financial and technical assistance to Iran if it sold oil to the Soviet bloc. Mosaddeq, the Soviet analysts concluded, was not interested in improved relations with the Soviet Union. The Soviet sources did not report that at this time Mosaddeq demanded a massive financial package from the US government, accompanied by a threat that otherwise “Iran would collapse” within thirty days and the Tudeh would take over the government. [[45]](#footnote-45) Mosaddeq’s behaviour and tactics gave full credibility to Soviet assessments that economic needs would eventually make Iran bow to American demands. [[46]](#footnote-46)

Another focus in Soviet reporting was the Anglo-American contradictions. In late October 1951 the conservatives, headed by Winston Churchill and Antony Eden, returned to power in the United Kingdom; the Soviet leadership expected from London a more assertive course, autonomous from the Americans. In late December 1951, the MGB reported to Georgy Malenkov (whose job was to supervise the “world communist movement”) that the British leadership considered a military coup against Mosaddeq. Americans supported the British position on Iranian oil, yet feared that Mosaddeq’s downfall would play into the hands of Tudeh. The Soviets also learned that at the US-British summit on January 7-8, 1952, Churchill and Eden urged a boycott of Iranian oil until the Iranians make concessions. The Americans, however, feared that a financial crisis in Iran could bring the communists to power. Churchill and Eden insisted that it was not a choice between the Mosaddeq government and communists in power. Eden was irritated by Acheson’s demand “to put an end once and for all to the problems in Iran and Egypt.” The Soviet sources noticed, however, that Americans did support the British idea to prepare ground for removal of Mosaddeq by parliamentary means. The two sides agreed to support “X” candidate, who was Qavam, as the next prime minister. In May 1952, the Soviet leadership learned that the entire pro-British network in Iran (wealthy merchants Asadullah and Saifullah Rashidian, Mohammad Nosratian, the chiefs of Southern tribes), coordinated by British councillor Robin Zaehner, began preparations to bring Qavam to power. [[47]](#footnote-47)

The Soviet intelligence informed that the Americans supported the British, yet the signals on that were confusing. The Soviet embassy in Teheran reported that Americans “promised Mosaddeq any military, economic and financial assistance on the conditions of Iran’s entrance into Western bloc.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Soviet reports were not far from reality, but lacked nuances, exaggerated American agency and underestimated Mosaddeq’s fierce insistence on complete independence of Iran from British and American political and economic interests, the stand that both appealed to and stemmed from radical nationalism in the Middle East.

**Moscow ignores Mosaddeq’s approaches**

In July 1952, the shah acted on Western advice, dismissed Mosaddeq and appointed Qavam, who immediately offered an oil settlement to the British. The plot failed, however, when radical nationalist protest exploded in Teheran, and Qavam ordered the army to use lethal arms against the crowd. The shah lost his nerve and distanced from Qavam. This and the mass support opened the road for Mosaddeq’s triumphal return. The Iranian nationalist leader blamed the British for the plot and appealed again to the United States for financial assistance and support. Acheson still hoped to use political means to influence Iranian politics and accepted the offer. Ambassador Henderson, the American military, and the CIA analysts, however, worried about radicalisation of political situation and an urgent need to act. [[49]](#footnote-49)

The July 1952 victory of Mosaddeq was another surprise to the Soviet observers. Mosaddeq, Soviet analysts wrote, joined the surge of “democratic forces” out of expediency, only to turn against them later. The MGB reported that Mosaddeq in a conversation with the Iranian Ambassador in the United States expressed fear that the explosion of anti-British feelings could bring the Tudeh to power. “Facing this danger, I wanted to save the country and stop the shift of mass support to the parties of the Left. This is the meaning of my policy.” The GRU station in Tehran reported on Mosaddeq’s purge of senior Iranian military in the army, the air force and tank units. If Mosaddeq manages to establish control over the army, the report concluded, he would “apparently establish a dictatorial order and bloc the growth of democratic movement in Iran.” [[50]](#footnote-50) In the view of the Committee of Information, another likely turn of events would be a cooperative US-British venture with the shah, to forestall the threat of “a communist revolution” and stage a military coup and remove Mosaddeq before he acquires too much power. The Soviet experts correctly identified two potential leaders of such a coup: General Fazlollah Zahedi and “well-known British agent [the leader of National Will Party] Seyyed Ziya-ed-Din [Tabatabai].” [[51]](#footnote-51) Indeed, the CIA and MI6, as well as the State Department and the Foreign Office, held a series of secret meetings. They recommended joint preparations for a coup against Mosaddeq. The Truman administration, however, rejected the recommendation. [[52]](#footnote-52)

Immediately after returning to power, Mosaddeq signalled to the Soviets that he was determined to keep Iran non-aligned with the US-organized Middle Eastern command, a political-military bloc against the USSR. He asked the USSR to provide political support for his policies. In October 1952, Mosaddeq expelled British diplomats and severed diplomatic relationship with the United Kingdom. The Soviet leadership, diplomats, and analysts, however, refused to accept Mosaddeq’s pro-independence stand. Instead, they believed that the Iranian leader acted with American support. “Facts show,” concluded the Committee of Information, “that the United States encouraged the aggravation of the British-Iranian conflict, with a view of pro-American orientation of Mosaddeq and his *dogged unwillingness* [the author’s italics] to have a rapprochement with the Soviet Union.” The intelligence services in Tehran reported that from the beginning of the conflict “the US representatives entered into secret talks with Mosaddeq about participation of American monopolies [corporations] in the exploitation of oil sources in Iran.” Thus, the Mosaddeq government “openly embarked on the path of collusion with the US ruling clique.” [[53]](#footnote-53)

In October 1952, Joseph Stalin said an authoritative word on who should lead national-liberation movements in Iran. He spoke at the 19th Party Congress in Moscow and urged communists to take over the national cause in their countries from the hands of “national bourgeoisie.” Stalin rejected the idea of an alliance with a third force, a clear reference to the National Front in Iran. [[54]](#footnote-54) Stalin took this stand one month before a shift in American policy towards Iran. Dwight E. Eisenhower was elected as President in November 1952. The new Secretary of State John F. Dulles believed in a falling domino effect that would lead to the loss of all oil reserves in the Middle East to communist control. His and Eisenhower’s view was that Iran’s economic and political crisis could lead to the communist takeover and the “loss” of Iran to the “free world” was inevitable if the United States did not act to remove Mosaddeq. [[55]](#footnote-55) Unfortunately, this is the moment when the archival paper-trail on Soviet intelligence and diplomatic reporting from Iran stops. Stalin harshly criticized Molotov for treason, and Molotov was cut off from sensitive information.. One can only assume, on the basis of the previous detailed and accurate intelligence, that the Soviet sources in Iran detected the American shift and reported about it to the aged and suspicious leader. They also must have reported him on the regular contacts of Mosaddeq with the American ambassador Henderson.

The death of Stalin on March 5 did not lead to an immediate reappraisal of Iranian affairs in Moscow. The new leadership of Georgy Malenkov, Lavrenty Beria, and Vyacheslav Molotov prioritized the efforts to end the war in Korea, and dealt with the crisis in East Germany. Beria launched reforms of the Soviet intelligence and security apparatus; he ordered all heads of Soviet intelligence stationsin foreign capitals, including Teheran, to come to Moscow for re-evaluation and possible replacement. [[56]](#footnote-56)

Mosaddeq, as it turned out, wanted to find out if changes in Moscow meant danger or a new opportunity. On March 30, he invited Soviet ambassador Sadchikov for a meeting to his house. The Iranian prime minister addressed him with a request: he wanted the Soviet Union to help him to undermine the oil embargo. According to Sadchikov’s report, Mosaddeq “declared that he does not want to play games with us and wants to lay out his offer in a frank way. His goal is to force the other [American and British] side to buy Iranian oil on acceptable terms for Iran.” An trade agreement on something symbolic, for instance Soviet purchase of Iranian sugar, would be a means to achieve this goal. The Soviet government, the Iranian leader continued, had a chance to help Iran in its independence struggle. Sadchikov asked for time to contact Moscow. Mosaddeq said that he would wait for our answer for five days.” Silence would be taken as a negative answer. “In which case,” Mosaddeq said, “he would lose hope and would be forced to enter into negotiations with representatives of the other side.” The Iranian leader had never before spoken to the Soviet representative so openly about his needs. In essence, however, it was the same blackmail by weakness, that Mosaddeq had earlier practiced in his relations with the Americans.[[57]](#footnote-57)

After five days, Sadchikov returned to the Iranian leader and on instructions from Moscow raised a question: “Should one consider your proposal, despite its economic nature, as a step aimed at improving Soviet-Iranian relations?” Mosaddeq misinterpreted this question as an invitation to return to the broken oil deal of 1946-37; he reacted with great anxiety. As long as he stayed in power, he said emphatically, he “would not undertake anything that would hurt Iran’s interests.” He had opposed the Soviet oil concession in the past, he continued, not because he was pro-British. Without the ban on the Soviet concession, it would have been impossible to pass the law on the nationalisation of the oil industry and withstand British pressure today.” Sadchikov continued to press: What would the Soviet Union gain for his assistance to Iran? The Iranian leader responded: “his government would stay in power.” [[58]](#footnote-58)

Sadchikov cabled to Moscow that Mosaddeq’s offer was “a classic act, according to a script of diplomatic gaming, cunning and deceit.”,The Soviet embassy reported to Moscow that Henderson, “in all evidence,” did not take Mosaddeq’s threat to sell oil to the Soviet bloc seriously, because Americans knew well that Mosaddeq was pro-American in his orientation. [[59]](#footnote-59) American sources corroborate this estimate, but in different terms. The CIA station in Teheran predicted that Mosaddeq would not defy the United States, because it would “deprive Iran of an important counterweight against Soviet pressure and a potential source of financial help.” [[60]](#footnote-60)

Cold Soviet reception of the signals from Mosaddeq contrasted with more attention to the shah: since Stalin’s times the Soviet leaders preferred to deal with a weak authoritarian ruler rather than with a democratic nationalist. In late April, former Iranian ambassador in Moscow Hamed Sayyah, a trusted man of the shah, assured Sadchikov that a successor to Mossadeq would adhere to Iran’s neutrality and seek to improve the Soviet-Iranian relations. Sadchikov wrote to Moscow that the shah “wanted us [to] stay detached from the Mosaddeq government and not to thwart (via the Tudeh and by other means) the change of the government.” [[61]](#footnote-61) The CIA analysts (and British councillors), who probably approved of Sayyah’s approach, concluded: “Soviet reaction to a forced change in government would be limited in nature.” The shah, however, continued to wait: he lacked courage to remove Mosaddeq by decree (*firman*) and instead waited for majority in Majlis to turn against the Prime Minister. [[62]](#footnote-62)

On April 24, 1953, the Presidium (Politburo) in the Kremlin reassessed Soviet foreign policy, including the one on Iran. On May 15, on the Politburo’s request, the Soviet Embassy sent a sweeping analysis of the Iranian-American relations. The analysis was a mixture of old thinking and new concerns. According to the memo, the Americans had “abetted” the National Front to nationalize the Iranian oil in order to weaken its British competitors on the oil market. The document defined American strategy in Iran as follows: 1) to undermine British domination in Iran and in the Middle East in general; 2) to seize control of considerable share of, if not all of Iranian oil; 3) to “take advantage of the national movement in Iran in the struggle against the British and to expand [American] influence in Iran.” [[63]](#footnote-63)

The Embassy, prodded by Moscow, also had to address the US Cold War agenda. Washington wanted “to pull Iran into the Western bloc and make it follow [Western] aggressive policy.” After the British had been expelled from Iran, the Americans deemed it necessary to support the British interests, with an eye on the consolidation of NATO and the US-British cooperation in the Far East against China. Another factor, the Embassy admitted, was “fear that American imperialism felt with regard of democratic movement in Iran, that emerged as a result of the nationalization of oil industry, and directed not only against British, but also against American imperialism, and accompanied by growing sympathy of the Iranian population towards the Soviet Union.” [[64]](#footnote-64) This evaluation was much closer to reality than previous Soviet assessments.

Molotov remained a staunch believer in the correctness of the old Soviet line. “Now, as before,” he wrote to Sadchikov, “you do not wish to understand the essence in the relationship between the United States and England on this subject. You should not forget that Mosaddeq had prepared the decision about liquidating British oil concessions at the behest of or after clearing it with the United States so as to remove from the world market the strongest competitors to the American oil monopoly.” In late May, the Committee of Information, now placed under Molotov’s supervision, wrote about Mosaddeq as a shrewd gambler who plots “to smash the national liberation movement and suppress opposition elements around the shah in order to create the conditions for a further collusion with American monopolies.” [[65]](#footnote-65)

The Presidium (Politburo) in Moscow continued to debate Soviet policy on Iran. [[66]](#footnote-66) Sadchikov was recalled to Moscow to participate in the discussion. Apparently, there was severe discord in the Presidium. Malenkov and Beria favoured a new policy to promote neutrality of Iran as well as of Austria. Molotov, however, believed it would be wrong to help Mosaddeq without imposing conditions. Molotov’s objections prevailed: helping Iran to breach the oil embargo would set Moscow off against the West and therefore could complicate Soviet peace initiatives elsewhere.

The Soviet ambassador was instructed to talk with Mosaddeq about small steps to improve the Soviet-Iranian relations. At the meeting on June 11. Sadchikov referred to frequent violations of Soviet-Iranian borders by “Iranian subjects” and proposed to relaunch the stalled Soviet-Iranian negotiations on various issues. Mosaddeq, however, misinterpreted it as a Soviet attempt to press Iran for territorial concessions. With great emotion, he said that if the Soviet Union would do so, then the Iranian government “would raise all [Iranian] claims against the Soviet Union.” [[67]](#footnote-67) Mosaddeq’s angry reaction took Sadchikov by surprise. The ambassador argued that the border talks would strengthen Iran’s position vis-à-vis Great Britain. Mosaddeq then broke into uncontrolled weeping. He said that “all this was the result of the death of great Stalin,” and that he had “forebodings that it would come to this.” For the next half an hour, the Iranian leader begged Sadchikov not to leak their conversation to the press. [[68]](#footnote-68)

The outcome of the meeting upset Moscow authorities, but the Soviet leadership was busy with the crisis in East Germany and the plot against Beria. Only after those events ran their course, Sadchikov was asked to send to Moscow a full record of this conversation. Sadchikov tried to defend himself by attacking Mosaddeq’s character: “What an extraordinary mix of treachery, cunning, hypocrisy, and hysterics – this guy Mosaddeq!” [[69]](#footnote-69) By that time the Soviet ambassador was already in serious trouble. On June 23, Molotov explained to the Iranian Ambassador in Moscow that Sadchikov had presented “incorrectly” the position of the Soviet government. In fact, the Soviet government had no intention to press Iran for territorial concessions and was interested in a settlement of disputed issues. [[70]](#footnote-70) And after Beria’s arrest Molotov’s authority on foreign policy strengthened. Sadchikov was removed from his position: the new ambassador in Iran was Molotov’s deputy Anatoly Larventiev.

This appointment did not signal any immediate improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations. Lavrentyev’s past record included the ambassadorship in Yugoslavia in 1946-49, when Stalin broke up with Josef Broz Tito, and a visit to Czechoslovakia on the eve of the communist coup in February 1948 (some US sources incorrectly stated he was ambassador there). A minimal diplomatic thaw, however, took place. Both Soviet and Iranian authorities agreed to “reassess all disputed issues” including the border conflicts and a possible return of 11.2 tons of Iranian gold deposited in Moscow during the Second World War. The awkward issue of oil was not mentioned. [[71]](#footnote-71) Lavrentiev arrived to Tehran in early August 1953, but by that time the position of Mosaddeq sharply deteriorated: his majority in Majlis was in doubt and the National Front coalition fragmented. Mosaddeq announced preparations for a plebiscite to dissolve the Majlis and elect a new one. On August 13, the Soviet-Iranian Commission convened, and Lavrentiev and Foreign Minister Hossein Fatemy opened their talks. Both sides kept dancing around the main issues without naming them. The Soviet genda for negotiations, approved by Molotov and the Presidium, ended with inconclusive “etcetera.” The Iranians obsessively inquired what this “entetera” could mean, but Lavrentiev had no instructions on how to respond. The talks broke for a summer recess without any progress. [[72]](#footnote-72)

The snail-paced Soviet-Iranian rapprochement contrasted with a burst of US-British preparations for a coup against Mosaddeq. The approaching armistice in Korea left the United States free to act in Iran. On July 11, President Dwight Eisenhower agreed to the proposal to use “legal, or quasi-legal, methods to install a new government in Teheran, with Zahedi as its prime minister.” [[73]](#footnote-73) During the following month, Soviet intelligence picked up signals of these preparations. Still, the Soviet leadership, now influenced by Molotov, considered these preparations as just a part of conflicting and unclear information from Teheran. Soviet intelligence reports informed on secret approaches that Mosaddeq made to the British via neutral countries; the Committee of Information concluded that the Iranian leader would soon reach a deal with the British. [[74]](#footnote-74) Lavrentiev wrote from Tehran that the shah continued to probe for a Soviet reaction to Mosaddeq’s imminent replacement. [[75]](#footnote-75) When several years later Molotov was investigated his “anti-Party behaviour,” one of indictments against him was that he had dismissed the Soviet intelligence reports about U.S. involvement in the anti-Mosaddeq coup. He was quoted as saying to his assistants: “Americans, of course, can perform as if they were really British friends and produce an impression of American pressure on the Iranian government on behalf of the British.” In reality, Molotov insisted, it was just a performance. [[76]](#footnote-76)

**Explaining the Coup**

After the overthrow of Mosaddeq, the Presidium colleagues asked Molotov to explain what had happened in Iran. Grigory Zaitsev, the new head of the Department of Middle East, prepared a draft memorandum on September 15, with conclusion: “The government of Mosaddeq possessed information about the preparation of the coup and had a capacity to liquidate it yet did not adopt necessary measures.” Mosaddeq, the draft concluded, remained passive and gave “reactionary forces” a chance to prepare for the triumphal return of the shah. He “embarked on the path of repressions against the democratic organizations and rejected [their offer] of joint actions to liquidate the coup.” This passivity owed “mainly by his fear of the subsequent growth of democratic movement in the country.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The People’s Party, the analysis continued, “uncovered in time the preparations for the coup, but did not take adequate measures to mobilize the masses. At the decisive moment, on August 18-19, the party leadership continued fruitless talks with Mosaddeq, who did not take necessary steps to suppress the coup. As a result of this stand, the leadership of the People’s party did not take initiative into their hands, did not lead masses out to the streets.” This gave a chance to a handful of conspirators to bring to power the reactionary forces led by General Zahedi.” [[78]](#footnote-78)

The report overlaps remarkably with what we know about the countercoup of August 18-19 from Iranian sources. [[79]](#footnote-79) Molotov, however, asked to amend the draft, add more details and enhance “the class point of view on the events in Iran.” “The main flaw of the report,” he commented, was to regard the stand of the USA and England in Iran “as something of a common [front]. In reality, there is a constant struggle in Iran between the USA and England, in different forms and with various degree of sharpness.” [[80]](#footnote-80)

On Molotov’s request, the second draft, prepared by Molotov’s deputies Andrei Gromyko and Valerian Zorin, provided a more detailed narrative of what happened, based on reports from Tehran. One paragraph is worth citing in full, as it demonstrates how well-informed were the Soviet embassy and intelligence services about the coup events:

“During the night of August 16, the plotters sought to overthrow the Mosaddeq government, but failed. As a result, the shah was forced to flee abroad. This event led to the demands of masses of people to overthrow the monarchy and to declare a republic. Mosaddeq and his supporters, however, did not support people’s demands and advanced a proposal to create a regency’s council. On August 18, the opposition newspapers published the shah’s firman of August 13 that appointed General Zahedi as prime minister, as well as the news that the USA does not recognize the Mosaddeq government. On the same day, Ambassador Henderson came to see Mosaddeq and declared that the USA would not have relations with him as ‘a legal government.’ After that Henderson got in touch with the people of Zahedi and declared that the American government recognized the Zahedi government as the legal government of Iran. Left without US support, scared by the unfolding democratic movement in the country, Mosaddeq assumed a passive stand with regard to the plotters and consciously [*soznatelno*] betrayed the national liberation movement. On August 19, the plotters brought out to the streets the gangs of ragtag elements (300-400 people), who started pogrom under the slogan ‘death or the shah.’ The Mosaddeq government did not take any measures against these gangs. The plotters led by Zahedi took advantage of this; with support of some military units commanded by the shah’s supporters, they seized power.”[[81]](#footnote-81)

The explanation of the passive behaviour of the People’s Party in the Soviet report is unconvincing. The criticism of the Tudeh appears to be an act of scapegoating. The events in Teheran developed way far too quickly for the Kremlin to give any “advice”, not to mention to convey it to the Iranian communists. It is also unlikely that any such advice would have directed the People’s Party to spearhead radical protests in Iran against Mosaddeq’s will. Barely a month after the Korean armistice and in the midst of a peace offensive with regard to the West, the Soviet leadership was hardly interested in encouraging a revolutionary adventure in Iran.

The Soviet document also demonstrates that Molotov and the drafters of the report were not surprised by Mosaddeq’s behaviour and the American role in the events. Just as Soviet estimates had consistently reported, the Iranian leader was unable to defy the Americans and launch a democratic revolution. The memorandum confirmed that Mosaddeq and Tudeh leaders discussed options during the first phase of the coup. It also confirmed that Henderson’s announcement on August 18th came as a big shock to the Iranian leader and paralyzed his will. [[82]](#footnote-82)

The Soviet drafts were surprisingly vague on the specifics of the CIA role in the coup. According to the report, a group of generals and officers, whom Mosaddeq had purged in the fall of 1952, acted jointly with British and American [officials]. The main role…was assigned to the Iranian Army.” Molotov wrote on the margins: “Nothing is said about the mechanics of toppling Mosaddeq (Schwarzkopf etc.).” This was a reference to the shah’s meeting on August 9 with American Brigadier General Norman Schwarzkopf, a police superintendent of New Jersey, who had organized the Iranian gendarmerie. The CIA sent Schwarzkopf to Tehran to convince the shah that the United States would back him in emergency and would ensure his safety during the coup against Mosaddeq. After that meeting, the shah agreed to sign *a firman* to dismiss the Prime Minister. [[83]](#footnote-83)

Molotov overlooked the significance of the new bond between the United States and the shah. He initially regarded Zahedi as another strongman, similar to General Razmara in 1950-51, who would keep Iran’s neutrality and balance between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Molotov was deceived by CIA disinformation campaign, aimed at keeping the Tudeh under check. After the coup, emissaries from Zahedi approached the Soviet Embassy with assurances that the new prime minister would build friendly relations with the Soviet government and to continue the meetings of the Soviet-Iranian Commission. The shah said the same in his press conference on August 23. The Soviet Foreign Minister undtudeh’serlined approvingly the conclusion in the report: “The Zahedi government, in order to boost its positions domestically and for deception of people would seek to demonstrate its willingness to maintain good neighbourly relations with the USSR.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Later, after fear of the Tudeh’s strike did not materialize, the shah, acting on American advice, cancelled the Soviet-Iranian talks. CIA analysts feared that if such talks took place, they would open room for Soviet machinations. [[85]](#footnote-85)

**Conclusions**

The Soviet sources demonstrate that the Soviet leadership, even after the creation of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the outbreak of the Korean war did not want to pick up a fight against the United States and its Western allies in the Third World.

Stalin’s “loss” of Iran in 1946-47 was just one of the causes of this bias. main root for this bias. It was not only the question of his wounded ego. Stalin’s distance from Iran stemmed from his concept of international politics. Moscow authorities and intelligence experts remained consistently hostile to Mosaddeq not only because of his actions to block the Soviet push for an oil of concession, but also because he was an anti-communist nationalist, who tried to play the Soviet Union off against the United States and the United Kingdom. Soviet estimates were accurate: Mosaddeq was willing to cooperate with the United States and rejected an alliance with the USSR and the Tudeh. Considering this, Soviet pre-existing mistrust towards the Iranian leader was justified and rational.

The projection of US power into the Middle East in 1946-50 was understood by the Soviet leader as extension of American economic interests, in the context of global struggle for oil. The optimal situation for the Kremlin, in this situation, was to see Iran as a contested object between the UK and the US, rather than an exclusive US protectorate. Moscow could never understand why the US worked so hard to restore British economic positions in Iran. The Soviet intelligence, however, recorded correctly on the joint British and American activities, and on the shah’s intrigues against the National Front. On the basis of this intelligence, the Soviet leader discounted the National Front’s ability to act as an independent actor; in his eyes, Mosaddeq and his allies had weakened the British influence only to invite American power to Iran.

Stalin’s policy towards Iran and the Third World in general, for all its lip service to the agenda of decolonization, did not recognize a potential for anti-Western nationalist movements in the Third World. Those movements could be supported by the USSR only when they served Soviet interests; when they failed to do so, they just remained the pawns of Western imperialism. This view of the National Front as an anti-British and pro-American force also determined the tactics of the Tudeh. The Soviet leadership in Moscow and officials in Iran ignored radical proposals of the party leadership to prepare for “a revolution”. The only political role the People’s Party could play, according to the Soviet calculations, was operating on the Left flank of the National Front, nudging it in a pro-Soviet direction, against the British and American interests. The Tudeh’s lack of independent sense of purpose, its marginality in Soviet schemes, along with its internal factionalism, contributed to the party’s fiasco in August 1953.

The article confirms that the United States were the decisive actor and factor in determining the fate of Iran in 1951-53. While the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations grossly overestimated Soviet motives and capacities, the Soviet leadership also viewed American power and interests in Iran through magnifying lenses. Stalin and Molotov did not understand the complexity of US motives in the Middle East, yet they concluded that challenging American power in that region was well beyond Soviet capacities. Only after Stalin’s death, the new Soviet leaders began to realized that radical nationalism and decolonization movements could be directed not only against the European colonial powers, but also against the United States. In 1955, Nikita Khrushchev asserted his control over Soviet foreign policy and embarked on a daring act to project Soviet influence into the Arab Middle East and in Asia, to support of “national-liberation movements.” The main beneficiaries of this shift were Egypt, Syria, Burma, Indonesia, and other countries of Asia and Africa. Iran, however, remained a major exception. Still, the lessons of the Soviet defeat in Iran in 1944-46 and the setback in August 1953 proved to be remarkably lasting. The Soviet leaders continued to respect the policy of non-involvement in the Iranian politics, and this line lasted until the end of the Cold War.

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2. Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: the struggle for the control of Iran* (New York, 1979); Richard Cottam, Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study (Pittsburgh:, 1988); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: the Eisenhower* *Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004); Nigel Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-1959* (London, 1996); Hugh Wilford, *America’s Great Game: The CIA’s Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (2013); Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991); Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Sa’ud, and the Making of US-Saudi Relations* (Bloomington, IN, 2002); Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002). On the synergy between oil and Cold War strategies see: Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York, 1991); Simon Bromley, *American Hegemony and World Oil: The Industry, the State System, and the World Economy* (University Park, PA, 1991); David Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of US Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); also his: David S. Painter. "Oil and the American Century." *Journal of American History*, 99, 1 (2012): 24-39; Stephen J. Randall, *United States Foreign Oil Policy since World War I. For Profits and Security*. 2nd edition (Montreal, 2005). For a broader context see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton, NJ, 1991); Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence. The Political Economy of the United States-Philippines Relations, 1942-1960* (Stanford, CA, 1994); Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and the United States. The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Robert J McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War: The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-1949* (Ithaca, NY, 1981); Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See in particular *Foreign Relations of the United States. Iran, 1953-1954.* (Department of State, Washington, GPO: 2017) edited by James C. Van Hook and Adam M. Howard. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Soviet primary sources include the so-called “raportichki” or summaries of the intelligence reports sent to the Soviet leaders by the Ministry of State Security (MGB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff. These summaries are filed in the papers of Vyacheslav Molotov. RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041-1043. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On this well-researched issue see: Louise L’Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Natalia Yegorova, “The ’Iran Crisis‘ of 1945–46: A View from the Russian Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 15 (Washington, DC, 1996); Fernande Sheid-Raine, “The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Origins of the Cold War,” in Origins of the Cold War: An International History, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter (New York, 2005), 93– 112; Jamil Hasanli, *Iran at the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet–American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946* (Lanham, MD, 2006); also his *SSSR-Iran: Azerbaijanskii krizis i nachalo kholodnoi voiny. 1941-46* (Moskva: Geroi otechestva, 2006); Fawcett, Louise L., ‘Revisiting the Iranian Crisis of 1946: How Much More Do We Know?’ Iranian Studies, 47/3 (2014), 379-399. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On the Iranian evidence see e.g.: Ervand Abrahamian. *Iran Between the Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 1982); also his *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the roots of the modern US-Iranian relations* (New York, 2013); Fakhreddin Azimi, “Unseating Mosaddeq,” in: Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, ed., *Mohammed Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 69-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This view is in Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005), 110-125. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On the Soviet documents and policies about this shift see i.a.: V.V.Naumkin, eds., *Blizhnevostochnyi Konflikt. 1947-1956. Iz dokumentov Arkhiva vneshnei politki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2 vols.*, (Moscow, 2003); Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War. The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, ed. James H. Hershberg, Cold War International History Project (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 119-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Many participants of this discussion consider the overthrow of Mosaddeq and the end of the National Front as “tragic.” See Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (New York, 1990); Fakhreddin Azimi, *Iran: The Crisis of Democracy, 1941-53* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989); also his, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Christopher de Bellaigue, Patriot of Persia, Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup (New York, 2012); Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks*(Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); a forum on the coup of 1953 in *Iranian Studies*, volume 45, number 5, September 2012; Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, “Down with the Monarchy”: Iran’s Republican Moment of August 1953, *Iranian Studies*, 50:2, 2017, pp. 293-313. On the preferences of Stalin’s successors and Nikita Khrushchev in Iran see: Vladislav Zubok, “Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The ‘Small’ Committee of Information, 1952–53,” *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 3 (1995): 453–72; also his: *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 44-46; Artemy Kalinovsky, “The Soviet Union and Mossadeq: A Research Note,” *The Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2014, 401-418; Roham Alvandi, ‘Flirting with Neutrality: The Shah, Khrushchev, and the Failed 1959 Soviet-Iranian Negotiations,’ *Iranian Studies*, 47/3 (2014), 419-440; James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of* *Mossadiq* (New York, 1997); Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, JH, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Considerable literature exists the Tudeh (People’s Party); its strength, communist control over it, and its degree of dependence on the USSR remain in contestation. See: Osamu Miyata, “The Tudeh military network during the oil nationalization period,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23/3 (1987), 313-328; Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London, 1999); also his: “Tudeh Factionalism and the 1953 coup in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33/3 (August 2001), 363-382. On the Soviet sources about the establishment of Tudeh see: Cosroe Chaquerie, “Did the Soviets play the role in founding the Tudeh party in Iran?” *Cahier du monde russe* 40/3 (1999), 497-528; also Jamil Hasanli, *SSSR i Iran: Azerbaidzhanskii krizis i nachalo kholodnoi voiny, 1941-1946* (Moscow: Geroi otechestva, 2006), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jamil Hasanly, *SSSR-Iran: Azerbaijanskii krizis*, p. 268-269. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On Stalin’s view of the importance of oil, see Hasanly, Op. cit., p. 41. On Stalin’s geopolitical mind-frame see Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin*. Vol. II: *Waiting for Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) and Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On this policy see e.g. R. K. Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy, 1941-1973* (Charlottesville, 1975); Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: the United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York, 2014), 219-250. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Louise L’Estrange Fawcett argued that the ADP differed from the Tudeh, as the latter was largely an Iranian creation. Soviet evidence cited in Cosroe Chaquerie (note 8) reveals that it was not so. Stalin’s decision to help create a second party on the Iranian territory reflected a shift of his priorities from the “anti-fascist democratic” agenda of 1941-42 to the postwar agenda, where the struggle for oil was more important. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause. The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. On the early tension between American and Soviet visions of the postwar world see Vladimir O. Pechatnov and C. Earl Edmondson, “The Russian Perspective” in: Ralph B. Levering, Vladimir O. Pechatnov, Verena Botzenhart-Viehe, and C. Earl Edmondson, *Debating the Origins of the Cold War. American and Russian Perspectives* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 105-114; also Vladimir Pechatnov, *Stalin, Ruzvelt, Trumen: SSSR i SSha v 1940-kh gg. Dokumentalnyie ocherki* (Moscow: Terra, 2006), p. 368-411. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Priem tov. I.V. Stalinym premier-ministra Irana Kavam-Es-Saltane [the Soviet transcript of talks between Stalin and Qavam], February 21, 1946; Zapis besdy tov. I.V. Stalina s premier-ministrom Irana Kavamom-Es-Saltane, March 4, 1946, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, ll. 20-28, 52-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. More on these talks see: Jamil Hasanli, *SSSR i Iran: Azerbaidzhanskii krizis i nachalo kholodnoi voiny, 1941-1946* (Moscow: Geroi otechestva, 2006), p. 255-256, 258-261. Priem tov. I.V. Stalinym premier-ministra Irana Kavam-Es-Saltane [the Soviet transcript of talks between Stalin and Qavam], February 21, 1946; Zapis besdy tov. I.V. Stalina s premier-ministrom Irana Kavamom-Es-Saltane, March 4, 1946, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, ll. 20-28, 52-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A memo from Qavam to the Soviet leadership, Moscow, February 26, 1946, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, l. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For more information see Fawcett, Op. cit.; Hasanli, Op. cit.; Fernande Scheid Raine, The Iranian Crisis of 1946 and the Origins of the Cold War,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, ed., *Origins of the Cold War. An International History*, 2nd ed (New York, 2005), 93-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Hasanli, Op. cit., p. 277-298. Pechatnov, *Stalin, Ruzvelt, Trumen*, p. 415-420. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Pechatnov, Op. cit., p. 422-423. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hasanly, Op. cit., p. 320-321. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Stalin’s cable to Molotov, Zhdanov, Beria, Mikoyan, Malenkov, October 1, 1946; Sadchikov’s cable to Stalin, i.a. Tehran, no. 1980, 1981, November 2, 1946, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, l. 95, 103-104. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hasanly, Op. cit., p. 374, 441-451, 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1218, l. 44-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Artemy Kalinovsky, “The Soviet Union and Mosaddeq: A Research Note,” The Iranian Studies, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2014, p. 401. On Araste’s request see: “Iz dnevnika Maksimova M.A. Priem iranskogo posla Araste 1 marta 1950,” RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1218, l. 14; on the spy scandal Ibid, l. 55-56. Unfortunately the available sources still do not disclose the total number of Soviet diplomatic, military, and intelligence presence in Iran in these years. It is safe to assume, however, that it was a much smaller number than at the peak of Soviet influence in 1946, when the Soviet presence included many officers of the Soviet Army, and hundreds of legal advisers and illegal agents from the Soviet Azerbaijan. On the American diplomatic and intelligence presence see the US presence in Abrahamian, *Coup*,  157-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. M. Panfilov, “Kratkaia spravka na novogo premier-ministra Irana Haji Ali Razmara,” June 30, 1950, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1220, ll. 103 – 113. On American suspicions of Razmara and deterioration of US-Iranian relations during his time see *FRUS. Iran, 1951-54*, p. 14, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. V. Grigorian, the head of the Foreign Policy commission of CC CPSU to Stalin, July 11 and October 2, with attachment of Tudeh’s draft report. On Maleki see: Gasiorowski, “US Perceptions,” p. 5. On Radmanezh and the “moderate faction” in Tudeh see Behrooz, in: Gasiorowski and Byrne, ed., *Mohammad Mosaddeq*, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The letter of Radmanesh, November 4, 1950 and the CC VKP(b) draft resolution on Radmanesh on in: RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1221, l. 48, 73-74, 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. V. Grigorian to Molotov V.M. A report on the military organization of the People party of Iran, August 20, 1951; V.Grigorian to Molotov V.M. A memo “On activities of the People party of Iran,” March 18, 1952, RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d.. 1221, papka 72, pp. 129-30; 149-156. The Iranian specialists, with reference to the CIA estimate, evaluate the Tudeh’s “hard-core” membership in 1952-53 as 20,000, including 8,000 in Tehran; the cited estimate for the military organization is “from 700 to 466,” the latter being “official” Tudeh estimate. See Abrahamian, *Iran*, 320; Behrooz, “Tudeh Factionalism,” 364, 367-268. The difference between the cited and Soviet figures are not substantial (except on the membership in the military organization). The difference in perceptions could be much greater: for the CIA “hard core” members were Iranian communists under Moscow control; the Soviet evidence, while claiming “control,” does not consider them as communists. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The memorandum by McGee to Acheson, April 25, 1950, *FRUS*. *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, 1950*, Vol. V [thereafter FRUS, 1950], Document 234 and the letter from Ambassador in Iran to the Acting Secretary of State, September 17, 1950, Document 275; “The Position of the United States with respect to Iran.” the NSC staff study, before March 14, 1951, *FRUS. Iran, 1951-54*, 2017 [Thereafter FRUS 1951-54 A] p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The documents from the Baku archives are quoted from Hasanly, Op. cit., p. 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On Stalin, the Soviet bureaucracy, and interpretation of intelligence information see e.g. Vladislav Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: the ‘Small’ Committee of Information, 1952-1953," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Summer 1995, 453-472; Harris, J., 'Encircled by Enemies: Stalin's Perceptions of the Capitalist World, 1918-1941', *Journal of Strategic Studies*Vol. 30, No. 3, 2007, 513-545. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. M. Maksimov to Molotov, “O ‘natsionalnom fronte’ v Irane (spravka)”, October 28, 1949, RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 1220, ll. 30-31. Mikhail Maksimov who signed this document was the Soviet ambassador in Iran before Ivan Sadchikov. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See a dispatch from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, May 4, 1951; The CIA Special Estimate, May 22, 1951, *FRUS, Iran, 1951-54*, p. 81, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. On the “American dilemma” see: Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 173-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. On the Harriman mission see Painter, Op. cit., p. 176-179. The Soviet analysts initially underestimated British anger and financial implications of the nationalization. See Valerian Zorin, the head of the Committee of Information, to Stalin and “other members of the Group of Eight”, on 9 September, 1951; Gen. German Malandin, deputy head of the General Staff and Matvei Zakharov, the head of the GRU to Andrei Vyshinsky, 19 September, 1951, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 184, 192. At this point the Soviet intelligence underestimated potential British losses of revenue from the nationalization. See *FRUS, Iran, 1952-54*, Vol. X, 1989, 75-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Mary Ann Heiss, “The International Boycott of Iranian Oil and the anti-Mosaddeq Coup of 1953,” in Gasiorowski and Byrne, eds., 178-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. In fact, the British prime minister Clement Attley opposed the use of force, that foreign secretary Herbert Morrison advocated. Ivan Savchenko, deputy minister of MGB, summary reports, October 3 and 4, 1951; Zakharov, summary report, October 24, 1951, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 207, 228; “The Iranian Situation,” Memorandum from Henry Villard of the Policy Planning Staff, Department of State, to Paul Nitze, September 26, 1951, FRUS, p. 137-138. On the American estimates of the situation see: FRUS, *Iran, 1952-54*, 1989, 327, 335. On the British perspective see Wm. Roger Louis, “Britain and the Overthrow of the Mosaddeq Government,” in: Gasiorowski and Byrne, Op. cit., 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Sergei Savchenko, deputy head of the Committee of Information, summary report, October 4, 1951; Semyon Ignatiev, the Minister of State Security (MGB), summary report, November 10, 1951, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 208, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. FRUS, Near East, Vol. 5, 126-127, 166; FRUS, *Iran 1952-54*, 1989, 400-402, 437-438. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Abrahamian, Op. cit., p. 123-129. On Egypt and MosaddeqMosaddeq’s stay there see Lior Sternfeld, “Iran’s Days in Egypt: MosaddeqMosaddeq’s visit to Cairo in 1951,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43:1 (January 2016), p. 1-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ignatiev, summary report, December 4, 1951, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ignatiev, summary report, December 23, 1951 and January 2, 1952, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 277; and delo 1042, l. 1; *FRUS, Iran, 1952-54*, 636. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See e.g. The Committee of Information to com. Stalin and the Politburo, “On the domestic situation in Iran,” 4 October 1952, AVPRF, f. 595, op. 6, papka 9, d. 769, l. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ignatiev, summary reports, November 16 and November 23, 1951; his summary report on Gunnar Jarring’s conversation with the US Ambassador in Iran Loy Henderson on January 8, 1952; also his reports on January 17 and 30, 1952; Savchenko, summary reports May 10 and May 14, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1041, l. 277, 278; delo 1042, l. 6, 15, 29, 161, 164. Memorandum of conversation of Acheson with Eden, November 4, 1951,, *FRUS, Iran, 1952-54*, 952. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. A report by the embassy on March 7, 1952, RGASPI, f. 82, opis 2, delo 1042, l. 65. More on Henderson’s talks with Mosaddeq on December 14, 1951 and their disagreements in: *FRUS, Iran 1952-54*, 513-514. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Dean Acheson to Truman, July 21, 1952; Dean Acheson, Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, July 26, 1952, *FRUS, Iran, 1951-54*, 2017, p. 288, 297-298. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Loy Henderson to the State Department, August 3, 1952, FRUS, *FRUS, Iran, 1951-54*, 2017, p. 312; The Committee of Information to com. Stalin and the Politburo, “On the internal situation in Iran,” 1 August, 1952, AVPRF, f. 595, op. 6, papka 7, d. 769, l. 6; Savchenko, a summary report, July 20, 1952; the head of the General Staff Vasily Sokolovsky and the head of the GRU Mikhail Shalin to the Politburo, 29 August 1952; Deputy head of the General Staff Mikhail Malinin, and deputy head of the GRU Fedor Fedenko, report to the Politburo, 18 September 1952, RGASPI, fond 82, op. 2, 1043. 258, 311, 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The Committee on Information, 4 October 1952, AVPRF, f. 595, op. 6, papka 9, d. 769, l.86-89. On the British support of Sayyed Ziya as a likely replacement of MosaddeqMosaddeq see Abrahamian, Op. cit, p. 90, 120, 152-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The Wilber document; Robert Sheer, “CIA’s Role in the 1953 Iran Coup,” Los Angeles Times, March 29, 1979; Abrahamian, Op. cit., p. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On the real and complex American attempts to provide limited finances to and purchase limited amount of oil from Iran in exchange of compensation to AIOC see Painter, Op. cit. p. 188-189. Ignatiev, a summary report to the Politburo, July 24, RGASPI, fond 82, op. 2, 1043, 263; the Committee of Information to Stalin and the Politburo, 23 October 1952, “On further aggravation of the British-Iranian conflict and the US intrigues in Iran,” AVPRF, f. 595, op. 6, d. 769, papka 9, l. 158-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The impact of this speech is noted in: Maziar Behrooz, “Communists Tried to Stop the 1953 Coup — But it was ‘Too little, too late’”, at: <https://iranwire.com/en/features/4789> (accessed November 15, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The best analysis of the American shift from wait-and-see to the support of a coup against Mossadeq see : Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup d’Etat Against Mosaddeq” in: Gasiorowski and Byrne, eds., Mohammad Mosaddeq, 227-233. The new volume of FRUS on Iran (2017) supports his conclusions. On the exaggerated American perceptions of Iran’s economic and political problems, resulting from the loss of oil revenues, see May Ann Heiss in: Gasiorowski and Byrne, Op. cit., p. 198-199,. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. More details in Vladislav Zubok and Constantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 154-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. From the diary of I.V. Sadchikov. A conversation with prime-minister of Iran Dr. Mohammad MosaddeqMosaddeq, March 30, 1953. Sent to Moscow on 1 April, 1953, AVP RF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 56, d. 356, l. 6-9. On Iran’s other attempts to find foreign buyers for its oil see Mary Ann Heiss in: Gasiorowski and Byrne, Op. cit., 193-197. She does not mention a possible deal with Eastern European countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The Embassy of the USSR in Iran, No. 179, 14 April 1953. Ambassador Sadchikov, “A conversation with prime minister of Iran Doctor Mohammad MosaddeqMosaddeq on 5 April 1953,” AVP RF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 56, d. 356, l. 10-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. The Embassy of the USSR in Iran to Moscow, April 24, 1953, AVPRF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 56, d. 361, l. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Memorandum Prepared in the Office of National Estimates, Central Intelligence Agency,

    Washington, March 11, 1953, *FRUS, Iran, 1951-54*, p. 496-497). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Sadchikov to the Foreign Ministry, 23 April, 1953, AVPRF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 56, d. 361, l.19-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. CIA Information Reports, March 31, April 16, and April 17, 1953; memorandum from John H. Waller to Kermit Roosevelt, April 16, 1953; CIA Information, “Tudeh Instructions Concerning Activities in Case of Anti-Mosaddeq Coup,” April 6, 1953, *FRUS, Iran, 1951-54*, p. 511, 514, 521-522, 523-538; Henderson to the State Department, May 8, 1953, *FRUS, Iran, 1952-54*, 554-555. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. On this re-evaluation see Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 154-162; Lavrenty Beria to the Soviet leaders from prison, July 1, 1953, “’Cherez 2-3 goda ya krepko ispravlius’…- Pisma iz tyuremnogo bunkera,” *Istochnik*, no. 4, 1994, 5. The Embassy of the USSR in Iran, no. 241, 15 May 1953. “The Irano-American relations during the last two years.” AVPRF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 57, d. 369, l. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. The Embassy of the USSR in Iran, no. 241, 15 May 1953. “The Iranian-American relations during the last two years.” AVPRF, f. 06, opis 12a, papka 57, d. 369, l. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. “The aggravation of the political situation in Iran,” 27 May 1953, AVPRF, f. 595, op. 6, papka 769, delo 16, l. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The Committee of Information, The chronicle of events for 1953 (June), f. 595, opis 6, papka. 769, d. 17, l. 259; *Sovetsko-izrailskie otnosheniia: Sbornik dokumentov*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarosnyie otnosheniia, 2000), p. 470-472. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The Embassy of the USSR in Iran, no. 299, July 1, “A conversation of Ambassador I.V.Sadchikov with Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddeq, June 11, 1953, AVPRF, f. 06, op. 12а, papka 56, delo 356, l. 26-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “A conversation of Ambassador I.V. Sadchikov with Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddeq, June 11, 1953, AVPRF, f. 06, op. 12а, papka 56, delo 356, l. 30-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibidem, l. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. AVP RF, op 12a, papka 56, d. 357, l. 1-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. AVP RF, op 12a, papka 56, d. 357, l. 1-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. The full transcripts of the talks are in AVP RF, opis 12a, papa 56, delo 356, l. 43-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. “Campaign to install the pro-Western government in Iran,” July 11, 1953, document 363, FRUS, p. 910-911. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The Committee of Information, “On the worsening of the Irano-American relations and the position of the Mosaddeq government,” July 17, 1953, l. 127-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 56, delo 356, l. 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. On the issue of anti-party position of V. M. Molotov in the period of revolution of national liberation in Iran in 1953, 1.1959, RGANI, collection of the Party Control Committee, I 3/76, delo 9, l. 1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Gasiorowski, “The CIA TPBEDAMN operation and the 1953 coup in Iran,” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. The second draft was presented on September 21. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 8, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 23-25. In fact, the US Ambassador was eager to hide the US involvement in the coup. See Henderson’s report on his conversation with Mosaddeq on August 18, *FRUS*, p. 685-690. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. While mostly a Kipling-esque fiction, the book of Kermit Roosevelt presents Mossadeq’s concessions to Henderson as a pivotal moment. *Countercoup*, 184-185. On the memoirs see Hugh Wilford, “Essentially a Work of Fiction. Kermit ‘Kim’ Roosevelt, Imperial Romance, and the Iran Coup of 1953,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 5 (2016), 922-947, esp. 936. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 7, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. AVP RF, opis 12a, papka 26, delo 360, l. 9-10. Memorandum from Waller and Wisner, the CIA, August 24, 1991, in: FRUS, p. 709. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)