
Never Make A Deal With The Devil

Evaluating American Cold War Policy in Iran

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Americans watching the news today are confronted with images of a world often hostile towards their country, and many question what motivates this fierce antagonism. Iran, for example, remains a consistent opponent of American policies, and many Americans have little idea why. Wrongly, many believe that “radical Islam” or some sort of economic jealousy of the Western world causes Iranian anger. However, the root causes of anti-Americanism in Iran go back further: they are grounded in American actions during the Cold War. In 1953, the United States Central Intelligence Agency planned and executed a covert operation that resulted in the overthrow of the popularly elected Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq. For the next 26 years, Iranians lived under the rule of the oppressive monarch the CIA restored to power: Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The events of the 1953 coup d’état and the regime which followed it reflect the impact of American Cold War strategic thought in numerous ways. As such, this important turning point in Iranian history also represents an important moment in American history. American policymakers approached 1953 with particular expectations for Iran in the broader context of Cold War geopolitical strategy. It remains open to debate whether this approach was the right one to take at the time, and whether a similar approach to foreign policy today could be considered any more appropriate.

By the 1950s, American policy had already become heavily preoccupied

with the threat of Soviet expansion. With the Korean War in progress, it was evident that the global battle to contain the spread of Soviet influence had to be carried into the Third World. In Korea this had meant armed military intervention under the auspices of the United Nations. In Iran, this meant taking measures to ensure that governmental power stayed out of the hands of the Iranian Communist Tudeh Party. The American decision to overthrow Mossadeq's government was informed at one level by his decision to nationalize the Iranian oil industry and his subsequent refusal to reach any negotiated settlement with British companies. But at another level, the coup ensured the suppression of the Tudeh under a pro-American regime; Mossadeq provided no such assurance, allowing the Tudeh to function and potentially gain power in his government. The American decision to overthrow Mossadeq arrived in the wake of a new Cold War vision inaugurated with the Eisenhower administration. Eisenhower and his foreign policy team, including the brothers Alan and John Foster Dulles (Director of Central Intelligence and Secretary of State, respectively), viewed the Third World much like a chessboard: Third World pawns had to choose and play for a side, aligning either with the U.S. or the Soviet Union. Under such a view, it became imperative to take action in the Third World when a state seemed to be drawing closer to the Communist bloc, as Iran appeared to be doing. Unlike Truman, Eisenhower viewed Mossadeq not as a bulwark against communism but as a serious liability. As a consequence of their simplistic new outlook, the Eisenhower foreign policy team approved the overthrow of a democratic government in favor of a dictatorial one, a decision that generated a silent legacy of Iranian bitterness that would erupt 26 years later with the Iranian Revolution.

Our story formally begins in April 1951, when the Majlis, Iran's Parliament, elected Mohammad Mossadeq the new Prime Minister of Iran weeks after the March 7 assassination of Prime Minister Ali Razmara, who had been killed by a member of the radical Islamic group Fadayan-e Islam. Razmara had opposed Iranian oil nationalization, an extremely popular initiative to

reclaim Iranian oil from the hold of British oil conglomerates. By contrast, Mossadeq championed oil nationalization and worked to embrace the nascent Iranian nationalist movement. Eight days after Razmara's assassination, the Majlis voted in favor of the Oil Nationalization Act, and, within a month, the newly elected Mossadeq began enforcing its terms.

Early American intelligence assessments of Mossadeq's government reported that he enjoyed the widespread support of his countrymen from atop a platform of nationalism. The CIA believed that Mossadeq enjoyed popular appeal among a wide range of people on account of these views. In a report for the President dated May 22, 1951, agency operatives described his politics: "Mohammad Mossadeq, Iran's new Prime Minister, is an extreme nationalist. He will attempt to curtail severely foreign influence in Iran and adopt a neutralist policy toward the East-West struggle...Mossadeq is at present in a strong political position."¹ What is revealing about the May 22 CIA communiqué is its description of Mossadeq's likely effort to "adopt a neutralist policy toward the East-West struggle."² This was an early perspective on Mossadeq and Iranian nationalism. In May 1951, with the Truman administration still in office and the American foreign policy establishment still considering options to address Third World nationalism within a broader Cold War framework, the concept of Third World neutrality still had credence. The actions of the Eisenhower administration make painfully clear that Truman's more nuanced view of Iranian nationalism did not survive the changing of the guard in 1953.

In 1951, Mossadeq's power was unquestionable; he commanded a following among "not only his National Front group but also [among] the Fedayan Islam...the illegal Tudeh [Communist] Party, and probably the great majority of Iran's laborers, tradesmen, and students, who can significantly affect political developments in Iran..."³ The popularity that fueled Mossadeq's power rested almost entirely on his drive to nationalize Iranian oil. The Oil Nationalization Act was designed to free Iranian oil from the iron grip of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), winning Mossadeq the support of an

Iranian public already steeped in hostility towards imperialism. The AIOC and the British government naturally protested the sudden loss of what they considered to be their material interests in Iran, but to little avail.

American policy during the oil crisis attempted to negotiate a compromise settlement on the issue. The U.S. had established its own position on Middle East oil in 1950, when the ARAMCO (Arab-American Oil Company) profit-sharing agreement provided for an equal division of petroleum profits between the Saudi government and the American corporation. However, Mossadeq and the British were unlikely to reach a similar compromise. On the contrary, it became clear that because Mossadeq's popularity was based so heavily on the oil nationalization and the removal of foreign influence from Iran, he had to reject any compromise settlement out of hand. British diplomat Sir Sam Falle recalls: "[Mossadeq's] position, power, and popularity were based on his nationalization of the AIOC, and it was probably politically impossible for him to allow them to return, certainly not openly, perhaps not even in disguise. This is one of the most important factors in this story."⁴ Falle's account highlights the problem that paralyzed attempts at a negotiated settlement of the oil crises: Mossadeq and the AIOC, bearing fundamentally incompatible agendas, could not coexist. This troubling reality eventually gave birth to Anglo-American discussions about removing Mossadeq to recapture control of Iran's oil. But such discussions went nowhere while Truman remained in office; Mossadeq's usefulness as a perceived bulwark against communist infiltration outweighed his stubbornness on the oil question.

The CIA concurred with Falle's assessment of Mossadeq's difficult predicament on the domestic political scene. In an October 1951 analysis paper, agency operatives wrote: "Mossadeq came to power on a wave of xenophobia... The Mossadeq government is the prisoner of the 'streets.'"⁵ The paper goes on to describe the "streets" as a combination of the followers of religious cleric Mullah Kashani and the even more powerful Tudeh Party. Most importantly, the paper points out that both elements of "the streets" provided

vital support for Mossadeq's government. The Tudeh seemed to be behind the new government "as long as Mossadeq's policy remains intransigent against the British."⁶ Another analysis report, from October 1952, provides a similar portrayal of Kashani and his supporters: "Kashani's extreme intransigence on the oil issue and his uncompromising demands for the termination of all foreign interference in Iran severely limit Mossadeq's freedom of action." The forces that had brought Mossadeq to power demanded confrontation instead of conciliation with the British. The same paper pointed out that "Political forces which Mossadeq himself encouraged in the past now require him to insist upon greater concessions than the British have given any indication of finding acceptable."⁷

These early events in Mossadeq's tenure help to explain the two domestic developments that contributed to the U.S. decision to overthrow him. First, Mossadeq found himself locked into a position that demanded consistent rejection of compromise arrangements with the AIOC. The same nationalism that had brought him to power demanded he remain firm in repelling foreign interference in Iran. Second, this political necessity created a serious problem for Mossadeq's government: economic crisis and internal division. In July 1951, the CIA concluded: "We believe that there is little doubt that for the present Mossadeq can continue [to] control [the] Majlis and [the] govt."⁸ By November 1952, however, the tone of reports to Washington had fundamentally changed. Mossadeq was in trouble:

Present trends in Iran are unfavorable to the maintenance of control by a non-communist regime for an extended period of time...The political upheaval which brought the nationalists to power has heightened popular desire for promised economic and social betterment and has increased social unrest. At the same time, nationalist failure to restore the oil industry to operation has led to near-exhausting of the government's financial reserves...and is likely to produce a progressive deterioration of the economy at large.⁹

Without British technical expertise at their disposal to operate Iran's oil industry, the Iranians were failing to capitalize on their most valuable financial asset. At the same time, as promised economic and social improvement remained unfulfilled goals on the National Front agenda, Mossadeq's political opponents multiplied. The domestic political situation in Iran grew more chaotic as 1952 progressed; greater numbers of disenchanted Mossadeq supporters began awakening from their nationalist dreams and seeking fulfillment elsewhere.

In the context of this rising turmoil, American anti-communism began to play a stronger role in shaping policy. The same November 1952 National Security Council report that described Iran's growing financial woes highlighted the "critical importance" of keeping the country "an independent and sovereign nation, not dominated by the USSR."¹⁰ The document highlights the importance of this goal for U.S. interests: Iran's strategic position, petroleum resources, and symbolic importance for American prestige demanded American attention. Interestingly enough, the report still predicted that "communist forces will probably not gain control of the Iranian government during 1953."¹¹

Nevertheless, the report warned against "the danger that communists might be enabled to gain the ascendancy as a result of such possible developments as a struggle for power within the National Front."¹² As Mossadeq's once glorious nationalist coalition began to split from within, American analysts grew increasingly concerned about the effect this would have on Soviet influence by way of their proxy, the Tudeh Party. In the waning days of 1952, as Truman prepared to leave office, the NSC unequivocally declared: "The major United States policy objective with respect to Iran is to prevent the country from coming under communist control."¹³ How they would accomplish this was to be determined on Eisenhower's watch.

On October 14, 1952, towards the end of the Truman administration, the CIA delivered a report to the President entitled "Prospects for Survival of Mossadeq Regime in Iran." Among its conclusions, the report stated, "If Kashani should come to power, the most probable result would be the

progressive deterioration of Iran, possibly leading to the eventual assumption of power by the Tudeh.”¹⁴ While not the most powerful endorsement possible, the CIA’s conclusion summarized neatly the primary impetus behind American endorsement of the Mossadeq regime: his chief rival could not safeguard Iran from the Tudeh. Amidst the growing division of the domestic political scene, Mossadeq represented the best choice Iran offered as a non-Tudeh head of government, perhaps the best of a bad lot. Aside from him there was Kashani, an even fiercer xenophobe, and the Shah, a vacillating and impotent figurehead. In Truman’s view, neither could defend Iran against communist infiltration better than Mossadeq. For better or worse, Truman supported him to the end.

When Eisenhower took office in January 1953, the Iranian political scene was in turmoil. The squall that had enveloped Mossadeq in the final months of 1952 erupted into a full blown hurricane in the early months of 1953. Externally the oil controversy with Britain had reached no resolution, while internally Mossadeq’s tenuous allies had now become potential threats. For the Eisenhower administration, Mossadeq’s ability and willingness to defend Iran against communism seemed to have been compromised. The crisis came to a head when Mossadeq attempted to force the Shah into exile at the end of February. The Shah refused to leave, and an anti-Mossadeq coalition began to coalesce around Kashani, comprising members of the army and religious leaders. According to CIA reports from Tehran, Mossadeq had begun to look for support elsewhere. A CIA memorandum issued on March 1 highlights the issue of growing concern among Eisenhower’s advisors: the developing connection between Mossadeq and the Tudeh. The memorandum reports, “On March 1 the Tudeh reportedly came out in support of Mossadeq.”¹⁵ Another CIA communiqué two days later stated that the Tudeh believed “Mossadeq’s continuation in power will best serve their interest.”¹⁶ A third communiqué, dated April 4, comments that “Mossadeq, apparently politically weakened, seems to be accepting Tudeh support.”¹⁷ Far from standing as a bulwark

against communist infiltration, to the Eisenhower administration it seemed that in the midst of political turmoil, Mossadeq was in fact colluding with the communists.

With American policy directed primarily towards preventing communist infiltration in Iran, Mossadeq's new bargain could not be tolerated. Yet plausible alternatives to his leadership were in short supply. Prior analysis had ruled out Kashani; it had been decided as early as October 1952 that he would be unable to stop the Tudeh from gaining control. The Tudeh were better organized and mobilized than Kashani's religious following. Realistically, that left only the Shah. Unfortunately, the same series of CIA documents which took note of Mossadeq's increasing Tudeh connections also noted that the Shah was unlikely to confront Mossadeq. The October 1952 report points out that "the Shah has almost completely lost his capability for independent action, but is a useful tool for Mossadeq."¹⁸ The March 1 communiqué makes a similar case even in the vastly changed context of the rising political turmoil: "The Prime Minister's position is more precarious than at any time since he came to power in 1951, but the Shah's vacillating nature and [the] conflicting interests of the opposition favor Mossadeq."¹⁹ This communiqué reveals that the CIA considered it unlikely that anyone, even the Shah, could replace Mossadeq. Most ominous of all, the March 3 communiqué concluded that "the diverse nature and conflicting interest of the forces opposing Mossadeq would undermine any government brought to power by his defeat and would presumably present the Tudeh with a new chance to further its aim of obtaining control of government."²⁰

In sum, the general message coming from Tehran convinced Eisenhower that safeguarding Iran from communist infiltration would require active American intervention. The Shah or any other leader in the Iranian political field would not ensure a desirable outcome on their own initiative. The plot to overthrow Mossadeq had first been proposed by the British, whose oil interests were the oldest source of the problem, but Truman had refused to initiate a coup because of Mossadeq's anti-communist credentials. But that day had clearly

ended: Eisenhower's team approved the CIA intervention. The superiority of Eisenhower's anti-communist thought over Western concerns about oil was evidenced in the plan for Operation Ajax (TP-AJAX in CIA lingo) drafted by the British Secret Intelligence Services (SIS) and CIA in June 1953. The plan called for CIA operatives to gain the Shah's cooperation in dismissing Mossadeq from the government and appointing General Fazlollah Zahedi to be the head of his new government. As part of the American attempt to gain the Shah's cooperation, the plan outlined American and British intentions, telling the Shah that "both governments consider [the] oil question secondary. [The] major issue is to maintain [the] independence [of] Iran and keep [it] from the Soviet orbit. To do this Mossadeq must be removed."²¹ While the entire controversy over oil nationalization provides an important context for American perspectives on Mossadeq, the issue clearly took a secondary position in American reasoning behind Operation Ajax. Certainly Mossadeq's stubborn refusal to negotiate and settle the oil controversy first marked him as a source of potential trouble. But what primarily drove Eisenhower to approve Mossadeq's overthrow was the growing fear of Tudeh – and therefore Soviet –infiltration into the government.

On August 19, 1953, Operation Ajax successfully overthrew Mossadeq and placed the Shah and his deputy Zahedi in firm control of the Iranian government and military. How this happened, while important to the history of the period, remains less relevant to the more central discussion of American expectations before and after the coup. Before the coup, the Eisenhower administration had grown apprehensive due to reports of strengthening ties between Mossadeq and the Tudeh. But the connection between this growing apprehension and the approval of Ajax cannot be made without considering Eisenhower's vastly different Cold War outlook. A top secret State Department memorandum dated August 10 – just nine days before the coup – provides some interesting points for consideration. The memorandum makes clear that despite the political instability documented in prior reports to Washington,

Mossadeq retained firm control of the government and his removal was neither imminent nor likely to occur in the foreseeable future. The document states:

It is unlikely that a coup d'état by Mosadeq's opponents among the former governing groups or by the Tudeh Party would be attempted because neither is sufficiently strong or well organized to attempt a coup. Furthermore, the Iranian Government is itself sufficiently alert and strong to anticipate and stamp out an attempted coup. The danger in Iran at the present time is that Mosadeq...may rely to an increasing extent on the Tudeh Party for political support. During this process, the Tudeh Party will have greater opportunities to infiltrate the various organs of government and may, during some future crisis while Mosadeq is Prime Minister, be in a position to demand representation in his government...in any event, Mosadeq's toleration of Tudeh activities and acquiescence in Tudeh political support increases the scope and prestige of the communists in Iran.²²

This memorandum summarizes the “facts on the ground” days before the final strike against Mossadeq's regime. It echoes the sentiments of the November 1952 NSC report which estimated that no communist takeover would occur in 1953. Eisenhower and his team could not have realistically expected that a Tudeh coup would overthrow Mossadeq and take control any more than they expected a Marxist revolution to erupt among the populace at large. What Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers really feared was that the Tudeh would increasingly gain support and legitimacy under Mossadeq, and might eventually gain representation in his government. What they feared – and chose to destroy – was really a nascent democratic system functioning normally. Given their fears, Eisenhower and his team acted to preempt what they viewed as Iran's inevitable descent into the Soviet sphere. Out of ignorance or negligence, the Eisenhower foreign policy establishment viewed “success” in Iran as any development that blocked the increase of Tudeh influence. They failed to consider the equally dangerous consequences that “success” could lead to: anti-Americanism and popular resentment against a government viewed as a “foreign tool.”

The oil nationalization controversy and its aftermath provide the context in which American analysts sought to understand Mossadeq; the political turmoil that enveloped and weakened him helps to explain why the U.S. gave credibility to reports of his growing closeness to the Tudeh. As old friends abandoned his camp, it seemed more plausible that Mossadeq would look to the Tudeh to rebuild his power base. But the oil nationalization crisis can provide only the context which shaped American views of Mossadeq's desperation. Ultimately it affected policy far less than American anti-communist fears that preceded the American experience in Iran. The logic of Eisenhower's decision was directly rooted in his general understanding of the Cold War world, not a particular understanding of the Iranian political situation. This unfortunate reality served as the flawed base upon which the American relationship with Iran would be built over the next three decades.

After the coup, the CIA and the Eisenhower administration carried away lessons on American intervention that were to affect policy elsewhere in the Third World. With their democracy in tatters, Iranians were left to be ruled by a dictatorial monarch in full control of a repressive military force. The success of the coup and the artificial tranquility that ensued "convinced US policymakers of the wisdom of the coup and the correctness of their own stereotypical cold war views."²³ Operation Ajax became a model for similar covert actions in Latin America and the Middle East; not all of these actions in the ensuing decades attained similar results. The Truman-era ideas about Third World nationalists seeking neutrality amidst the East-West conflict rapidly lost credibility in foreign policy circles. In 1957, the Eisenhower Doctrine encapsulated many of the new assumptions about the necessity of American intervention to ensure the containment of communism and encourage Third World nationalists to drift into the American corner.

Meanwhile Iranians remembered the American intervention even as they saw their monarch developing close ties with the government responsible. The intervention, along with subsequent support for the increasingly dictatorial

regime of the Shah, “Was interpreted by Iranians, liberal and non-liberal alike, as a highly hypocritical act committed by a country that professed to be the leader and protector of the free world.”²⁴ The blowback from that perceived hypocrisy would materialize as a mass revolution 26 years later. The legacy of the coup was a repressive dictatorship for which the average Iranian could hold the U.S. just as accountable as the Shah. Between 1953 and 1979, the U.S. developed an intimate relationship with the Shah of Iran, and American expectations towards Iran were still blinded by the Soviets and molded to fit a dominating policy framework. This framework represented a skeletal foundation of American notions, upon which concrete policy decisions were made, that had very much to do with combating communism and very little to do with addressing Iran as an independent actor, which is in fact what it was prior to the 1953 coup.

Intervention in the domestic affairs of Middle Eastern countries was thus a policy designed in the context of the Cold War. Accordingly, American expectations related almost entirely to Soviet actions and reactions, or those of domestic communists linked to the Soviets. That non-Soviet actors might become just as dangerous to American designs had not been anticipated. But that is exactly what happened in January 1979, when the Iranian Revolution ousted the Shah’s government and established the rule of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. While the events of the Iranian Revolution merit the volumes that have been written about them, in this paper it is important only to note that anti-Western hostility and hatred of the Shah for his role as a “foreign tool” led to the end of an era. The revolution created a state that fundamentally opposed American designs for Iran and the Middle East. Like the monstrous hydra of ancient Greek myth, as American policy cut off one head (Mossadeq’s), from the stump spawned a multitude of new ones: Khomeini and thousands of his rabidly anti-American followers.

The Khomeinis of the world have not disappeared; they present complex problems that American foreign policy contends with even today. As a result, it is essential to understand the environment that facilitates their

advent and empowerment. The fundamental underlying factor that American administrations from Truman to Bush Sr. had to account for was the bipolarity of the international system. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a power struggle that took dozens of forms over the course of the past 50 years. Iran represented only one of those forms, a case in which American apprehensions led to policies designed to stay a step ahead of communist infiltration. In the process, American leaders betrayed Mossadeq and the democracy he represented, although no substantial reports indicated that his government was under existential threat from the Tudeh. Cold War paranoia made suspicion of communist sympathies fatal in American eyes.

The U.S. did not attempt to hide its close relations with Iran under the Shah, and Iranians likely knew where to look in seeking the source of their repressive government's real power. Perhaps it is saying nothing novel to assert that the Iranian Revolution resulted from anti-Americanism that first began as a consequence of Mossadeq's overthrow. But less obvious is the real connection between the Cold War and American foreign policy dilemmas today. The Cold War should not be viewed merely as a conflict between two superpowers, for two reasons that emerge from the history of Iran and America. First, such a view marginalizes the Third World, which served as perhaps the most crucial Cold War battleground of all. Unlike older conflicts, victories and defeats in the Cold War took place in distant lands bearing no obvious relation to either the U.S. or the Soviet Union. The Cold War was a global phenomenon, and, as often as not, American policy found itself locking horns with Third World leaders who were as difficult to contend with as any Soviet; this was certainly true in Iran.

Second, the view of the Cold War as a primarily U.S.-Soviet conflict lends itself to the dismissive notion that the Cold War is over. While the Soviet Union and the bipolarity that defined the Cold War era no longer exist, American policy still contends with issues rooted in Cold War conflicts. Although the Cold War has ended in a literal sense, to declare it over seems to wrongly imply

that contemporary foreign policy issues are entirely a product of the new world order. On the contrary, Iran imparts a definite sense of continuity from the Cold War era with respect to some of the most significant foreign policy issues the U.S. confronts today. At its core, Iran has not changed in the years since 1979; it remains fundamentally hostile to American interests and resentful of American actions, which the Iranian government denounces wholesale as neo-imperialism.

The Cold War's impact on American foreign relations in the Third World remains one of its most enduring legacies, largely because American policies seem to have been better remembered in the Third World than in Washington. American actions during the Cold War era have had the unfortunate effect of conceding moral leverage to the sort of populist, demagogue-type leaders that have inherited the mantle of Khomeini. To argue that America's image in the world has suffered since 9/11 as a result of our preemptive military actions and generally unilateral attitude – a claim often made by critics of the current administration – is to understate the case: the roots of America's negative international image stretch back much further. Unilateralism and military preemption may be novel concepts; indeed, the tendency during the Cold War was to tread carefully and build as large an alliance as possible (as a result, the formation of NATO). But the idea of intervention irrespective of consequence is nothing new, and in continuing to follow such policies, current American leaders are unfortunately repeating the mistakes of the past. Insofar as our foreign policy is still based on strict adherence to a dominant foreign policy framework (though a decidedly different one), instead of a more nuanced view, very little distinguishes current American policy from the policies of the Cold War.

Current Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad capitalizes on abundant anti-Americanism among his citizenry, harnessing that public sentiment to serve his own ends. He came to power in 2005 replacing a far more conciliatory government; now he regularly attacks American policy at a

philosophical and moral level. That he is reviled and even ridiculed by many in the Western world is almost irrelevant; his arguments against the U.S. and Israel draw supporters in the Middle East and may continue to be a foreign policy headache for years to come. Ahmadinejad and his ilk stand on the same nationalist platform that Mossadeq once stood on. The issues have changed, but the ideas have not: whereas Mossadeq demanded oil nationalization, Ahmadinejad remains intransigent on Iran's right to develop nuclear weapons. Both, however, appeal to nationalism, self-determination, and "imperial" hypocrisy. Largely as a result of our Cold War policy choices, American leaders today are unable to respond convincingly to a non-Western audience. The Cold War's relevance to our current foreign policy dilemmas is simple enough: we have seen all this before. The details – which do matter – may be different, but at its core, the dilemma of a provocative nationalist leader in the Third World is not unfamiliar. The events of 1953 not only inform our current dilemmas in Iran and the Middle East, but, to a considerable extent, they also resemble them.

Although the CIA would have disagreed in its immediate aftermath, the Iranian coup was not America's finest hour. At best it can be considered a Pyrrhic victory, a triumph purchased at a so high a cost as to render it undesirable. The costs in this historical instance are represented by the Islamic fundamentalism and virulent hostility now firmly rooted in Iran, products of the devil's pact that Eisenhower and American policymakers made in 1953. Nothing can be done to reverse that pact now. But a lesson can be learned from it: foreign policy grounded in a simplified worldview is more likely to fail, at a high cost to American interests. Eisenhower and the American leaders who followed him ignored the potential for Iranian blowback because such concerns had little relevance to addressing Soviet infiltration. When the Berlin Wall came crashing down and the Soviet Union broke into fragments, for a brief period it almost seemed like history had ended and American policy had been proven right in the end. But like all Pyrrhic victories, it was short-lived: Islamic

fundamentalism has gripped Americans with a new sense of terror.

It is somewhat ironic that the new dominant framework in American foreign policy today is based on addressing the very Islamic fundamentalism that had previously been ignored. No less ironic is the American attempt to sell Middle Eastern democratization as the cure, given that American policy in the 1950s tore down democratically elected governments because of the sort of leaders those governments brought to power. Cases like Iran should teach the American establishment that short-sighted policies molded to fit a dominant foreign policy perspective often yield long term consequences as threatening as the original danger they were designed to counter. While the U.S. combats terrorism, policymakers must not neglect addressing the rising economic and military might of China, the growth of hegemonic power in Putin's Russia, or the persistent problem of global nuclear proliferation. Intelligent policy can and should concern itself with latent threats that may emerge as more powerful dangers in the near future. While it is clear that future American leaders must address the most fundamental issues of their times, hopefully while doing so they choose to look outside the dominant framework of the international system more than their Cold War counterparts did.

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A Note on Works Cited

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All works listed as “Accessed online at the GW National Security Archive, “Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran.” can be found at the following url:

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