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American Imposition of Authoritarian Regimes During the Containment Era:

A Case Study in Iran

Abstract

The 1953 Iranian coup against the democratically elected leader, Mohammad Mosaddeq, has been a massive indicator in modern Middle Eastern politics, within both Iran itself and the regional manifestation of the country's anti-American politics. That said, in regards to United States foreign policy in the Middle East as well as this manifestation of anti-Americanism, rise of authoritarianism, and political Islam, the 1953 coup is directly related to the political culture of Iran today. Furthermore, the coup is directly related to the dominating political sentiment within the region today as it relates to the Islamic Republic of Iran's attempts to exacerbate the anti-Americanism inherent in this political culture.

Introduction

During the Cold War, one of the United States' first strategies to combat the Soviet ideology of global communism was containment—or the restriction of communism to areas already within the Soviet block. This strategy often manifested itself through the overthrow of regimes threatened, whatever the scale, by communist forces, to be replaced by authoritarian regimes that went directly against the ideals of American democracy. That said, the 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Mohammad Mosaddeq in Iran is a profound example of American intervention due to containment era foreign policy. Furthermore, it is a profound

example of the long term consequences that stem from this era of policy—in this case, within the state and within the policies utilized by the state in order to further its regional interests. Thus, this paper will analyze not only the imposition of this regime, but how the coup shaped Iranian regional policy as it relates to anti-American and anti-imperialist sentiment. Given the nuanced threat of communism in Mohammad Mosaddeq’s anti-western, nationalist rhetoric in Iran, the American imposition of authoritarian regimes resulted in massive repression tactics, counter insurgency, and long term threats to American foreign policy. Above all, however, it led to the question of how the United States in 1953 shaped the modern Islamic Republic of Iran and how this has manifested in Iranian regional policy.

#### Literature Review

The particular cases in which the United States has launched operations to overthrow regimes with possible communist affiliations throughout Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East are well known and documented, with a broad range of journalists detailing and commenting on the distinct circumstances of each. Within the frame of work written on the imposition of regimes friendly to the United States, there is a wide retrospective criticism on the methods carried out to put these regimes into place as well as the internal consequences caused by supporting these regimes. There is not, however, a significant analysis of containment era politics undermining the long term foreign policy interests of the United States as it pertains to the adaptation of a state’s regional anti-American politics. On that point, the intent of this work is to look at the particular case of regime change and consider the individual circumstances of the country as well as how it was shaped by the coup, particularly in the manifestation of modern political culture.

Stephen Kinzer's *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* is a good starting point for analyzing how current literature on the phenomena of the imposition of authoritarian regimes is often singular in outlining the lasting consequences. Kinzer is not only deeply critical of the coup against Mohammad Mosaddegh, but also aware of its effects on both the increased distrust of the United States in Iran and in the surrounding region. Notably, Kinzer traces not only the 1979 Iranian Revolution to Mosaddegh's coup, but also current radicalism throughout the Middle East. Thus, Kinzer's analysis of United States' intervention is most strongly critical in its outlining of lasting regional consequences, and fits best with the research question of this work. Kinzer does not, however, detail the specific adaption of anti-American sentiment in Iran as related to regional policies and goals.

On that note, both Mostafa T. Zahrani's *The Coup That Changed the Middle East: Mossadeq v. The CIA in Retrospect* and Andreas Etges's *All that Glitters is Not Gold: The 1953 Coup against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, Intelligence and National Security* make a point to note how few other upheavals throughout the Middle East saw wider and more lasting consequences than the overthrow of Mosaddegh. Both note that while containing communism was the justification for the coup, the legitimacy of the regime installed by the United States under the Shah was inherently compromised. Etges argues that the threat of communist control in Iran was exaggerated and unlikely, and therefore by making Iran a 'client state,' long term relations were in detriment far more than they would be without the coup. By imposing a regime that squashed all opposition, Zahrani contends that the United States directly contributed the rise of political Islam within Iran—the main purveyor of both the 1979 Revolution as well as a significant strain in relations between the United States and Iran today.

Furthermore, Charles Kurzman argues in *Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979* that continued United States support for the regime contributed to intense Iranian nationalism in opposition to American influence. Using nationalism, Iranian opposition forces altered the internal structures put in place by the regime in order to dismantle power dynamics and remove the military as a coercive force. Thus, in this way, Iranian revolutionaries took structural power away from a regime that already lacked legitimacy. This is a much more singular focus than the aforementioned works, but notable in way it outlines the methodology in how the revolution undermined and adapted the objectives of the state.

Long's *Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa* has a distinctly less singular focus and does not outright present an argument. Rather, a direct and factual account of the history of modern Middle Eastern states is laid out for readers to analyze the sequence of history that led to current regimes. Long does, however, discuss the prevalence of the 1953 coup in relation to not only the 1979 Revolution, but also the distinct rise and support of political Islam by Iran.

Sabri Ciftci's *Soft Power, Religion, and Anti-Americanism in the Middle East* and Seyed Hossein Mousavian's *Iran and the United State: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace*, in contrast to the aforementioned works, have a much broader focus. Whereas the previous works often focus in on either the 1953 coup or the 1979 revolution, both Sabri and Mousavian's work focus on a much deeper analysis of Iranian-American relations and how Iran has adapted these relations to fit their political agenda. That said, Sabri focuses on Iran as a purveyor of regional influence standing in contrast to other regional powerhouses—Saudi Arabia

and Turkey—and how this dynamic allows Iran to distinguish and amplify its own power politics. Mousavian, on the other hand, gives a long-term and broad analysis of how Iranian-American relations have adapted in a way that Iran can use anti-Americanism as a method of increasing regional influence.

Farhad Rezaei's *Iran's Nuclear Program: A Study in Proliferation and Rollback*, on a different note, focuses on modern Iranian-American relations as they relate to Iran's nuclear program. This piece makes a point to explain how anti-Americanism plays in to the desire for a nuclear program within Iran, and furthermore, how nuclear proliferation in Iran is deeply dependent on regional politics.

Overall, this literature suggests the role of the United States was not only in imposing authoritarian regimes in order to combat the threat of communism. Rather, this role manifested in a removal of legitimacy for the regime and therefore a growth of political Islam, nationalism, and populism that decimated US standing within the region. These works outline the existence of general regional consequences in response to the coup, but do not outline how Iran utilizes the anti-Americanism inherent to its regime as a result of the 1953 coup.. Thus, these works have a focus that does not take into account the finer points of how the removal of Mosaddeq shaped the perspective of modern Iranian politics and how that perspective has manifested in the creation of the Islamic Republic and its regional policies.

Given the idea of looking at containment era foreign policy as less singular to particular countries and more-so as a regional phenomena tied to US foreign policy, the methodology used to generate an overall understanding was begun by looking at singular accounts and studies that focused on US backed regime change in Iran. Using this secondary data collection to gain a

concise understanding of the Iranian coup, the research and data from the chosen literature was then analyzed for both noteworthy consequences and for aspects of policy that manifested from the political legacy of the coup. In this way, a specific frame work of United States foreign policy during the containment era can be drawn that ties together policies within Iran that ultimately shape the it's modern regional policies.

### Main Argument and Findings

When analyzing the current state of Iran in connection to the 1953 coup, it is important to begin with the discovery of oil reserves in 1908 and the subsequent creation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company the following year. Given the primitive, unsanitary living conditions of Iranian laborers compared to the mass of profits reaped by the British Empire, decades of anti-colonial resentment were already in place by 1953. During this period, Great Britain continuously attempted to ensure oil security by interfering with the legitimate authority of the Iranian government, a monarchy under Mohammad Reza Shah. By undermining the interests of the Iranian people by financing an increasingly unpopular government to bend to outside business interests, Great Britain acted as a neocolonial conduit for growing dissent among the population (Kinzer, 2003, p. 49). This dissent manifested in the rise of political activity throughout the country, particularly in tune with a widespread sentiment to nationalize the oil industry and create a government separate from the influence of European neocolonial powers.

Throughout the 1940's, nationalist, Islamic, and leftist forces became increasingly prominent actors within the political sphere of Iran. In 1949, several moderate nationalist parties joined to create The National Front, whose main political platform rested on the nationalization of the oil industry and the creation of a democracy in Iran (Long, 2007, p. 49) The creation of

this democracy, however, entailed the seizure of power from the monarchy, the pro-British upper class, and the British oil elites that had a prominent stake in the Iranian government. Using the symbol of the Iranian identity to attract popular support, the National Front under Mohammad Mosaddeq succeeded in gaining political legitimacy from the population. Thus, the party was able to shift the balance of power from the traditional monarchy under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to the parliamentary system (the Majlis), whose power had previously been subservient to the monarchy (Kinzer, 2003, p. 139).

As prime minister, Mosaddeq implemented significant changes that placed the monarch as little more than a figurehead, while the prime minister oversaw the government. The replacement of the monarchy by democratic forces allowed for full nationalization of the oil industry—which, according to Mosaddeq, was the sovereign right of all states. In addition to the nationalization of the oil industry, Mosaddeq instituted a number of social reforms that accounted for the staying power of his popular support. Notably, many reforms revolved around his support for women's rights, religious freedom, and the secular and free status of courts and universities. In addition to these, he implemented a number of reforms that freed peasants from forced labor on their landlords' estates; took twenty percent of the income landlords received through rent in development projects for pest control, rural housing, and public baths; ordered factory owners to pay for medical leave; and established unemployment benefits for Iranian citizens (Kinzer, 2003, p. 140).

The British government, however, considered nationalization theft of the empire's property and imposed a crushing embargo on the Iranian economy in order to exert financial pressure on both Mosaddeq and the population, hoping ultimately to undermine the effectiveness

of Mosaddeq's democratic support (Zahrani, 2002, p. 84). The Anglo-Persian (now Anglo-Iranian) Oil Company increased output from other oil producing countries, and additionally declared it illegal to buy Iranian oil. In reaction to this, Mosaddeq ordered the expulsion of all British employees from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951. With pathways to Iranian oil effectively closed, British leaders put in place a covert operation to remove Mosaddeq from office with the aid of a network of pro-British Iranian politicians, businessmen, military officers, and elites. With the failure of this operation, however, Britain broke off diplomatic relations in November 1951, closing its embassy, recalling its staff, and effectively ending the long era of British neocolonial control in the country (Zahrani, 2002, p. 85).

During this period, the United States under President Truman regarded Mosaddeq as a potential barrier against Soviet influence and domination, and thus endeavored to broker a compromise between Iranian nationalists and Great Britain. Aside from direct financial aid to the operations of the oil industry, which the Truman administration declined to offer, the United States gave tacit support to Iran and the right to nationalize the oil industry, as long as sufficient compensation was offered. The overriding objective, in Washington, was to prevent Soviet influence from becoming a prominent force in the new Iranian political system, and further to prevent a full communist takeover of the government by the Tudeh Party (Zahrani, 2002, p. 95). This objective changed, however, with the 1952 election of Dwight D. Eisenhower and a Republican Congress. Zahrani describes this change in the United States government as a precursor to change in Iranian-US relations:

...a new British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, sent a team of officials to Washington to discuss plans for removing [Mosaddeq]. C.M. (Monty) Woodhouse, then SIS station



chief in Tehran...met at CIA headquarters with Frank Wisner, a director of covert operations. Woodhouse found that while Truman would not approve the British plan, President-elect Eisenhower was more open to the idea. As Woodhouse put it to the Americans, "Even if a settlement of the oil dispute could be negotiated with Mossedeq, which is doubtful, he was still incapable of resisting a coup by the Tudeh [Communist] Party, if it were backed by Soviet support. Therefore he must be removed" (Zahrani, 2002, p. 95).

Given both Great Britain's inflation of the threat of the Tudeh Party, as well as the new administration's strategy for containing Soviet expansion, US approval of the coup showed an administration under pressure to show new resilience against the communist threat, as well as an administration that saw nationalist movements as facets of communist control (Etges, 2011). Furthermore, meetings to discuss and facilitate the coup began only two weeks after Eisenhower's inauguration, suggesting a method of combating Soviet expansion that began in the imposition of a new regime in Iran, but was upheld in later CIA missions. In retrospect, however, the threat of the Tudeh Party to both Iran and United States interests was vastly over-exaggerated. The complexity of Mosaddeq's political relationship to the Tudeh Party is significant, but ultimately this relationship did not go beyond the party's political support for Mosaddeq:

For Ambassador [Loy W.] Henderson, "Mosaddeq was not a Communist, and I was convinced that he was opposed to communism as an ideology. Nevertheless, he was willing to accept Communists and their fellow-travellers as allies." ...Mosaddeq himself played the Communist card, warning the United States that without its support there

would be the threat of a Communist takeover in Iran. This was most likely a tactical move, but one that backfired, because it confirmed American fears. But although Mosaddeq increasingly relied on the support of the Tudeh, a Communist takeover was no realistic scenario...After Stalin's death in March 1953, the Soviet Union was acting less aggressively. While it knew about the planned coup in advance, it took no actions against it except for protests and also gave no special support to the Tudeh Party (Etges, 2011).

Yet the coup, originally planned by British operatives, was still carried out, at least in the eyes of American officials, under the guise of ideological defense against the growing support of the Tudeh Party.

General Fazlollah Zahedi was designated by British operatives during the Truman era to be Mosaddeq's successor in the event of a successful coup. In addition to Zahedi, operatives were to rely on a large band of Iranian subversives who had been left behind after all British agents and spies were expelled from the country in 1951. Thus, with the commitment of the Eisenhower administration to the coup d'état, Operation Ajax was undertaken under the direction of CIA field commander Kermit Roosevelt and in conjunction with British operatives.

Ambassador Loy Henderson, who saw Mosaddeq as a figurehead of the extreme left and believed that Iran was not ready for democracy, began the operation by contacting both the aforementioned subversives as well as prominent Iranians who might benefit from regime change (Kinzer, 2003, p. 155-156). These subversives quickly launched an uprising, albeit a short-lived uprising, in the southern provinces of Iran. Believing that the Shah was involved, Mosaddeq suggested he leave Iran until the political climate had cooled and stabilized. Rather than portraying it as the mutual decision it was, however, subversives launched a public

campaign to convince the public that Mosaddeq had forced the Shah to leave against his will and would soon move to abolish the traditional monarchy. The mob that soon formed outside of Mosaddeq's house not only forced the Shah to cancel his departure, but also contributed to the sense of growing political instability between political factions (Kinzer, 2003, p. 157).

Other Iranian subversives focused on creating dissent within the National Front, producing defections within the party that weakened not only its overall political stance, but the political stance of Mosaddeq. Further chaos and instability was created by the kidnapping of popular Tehran police chief, General Mahmoud Afshartus, who was ultimately killed in the plot. His death not only shocked the country in the implication of political instability, but it also succeeded in eliminating an obstacle to the oncoming coup (Kinzer, 2003, p. 162). From this point on, a select and detailed number of objectives were put in place in order to accomplish the coup. These objectives consisted of the manipulation of public opinion against Mosaddeq by portraying him as corrupt, pro-communist, and hostile to Islam; the implementation of staged attacks on religious leaders to appear as if ordered by Mosaddeq; the bribery of military officers to comply and participate in the coup; the bribery of members of parliament to comply and participate in the coup; and the planned dismissal and arrest of Mosaddeq by parliament and army units, respectively, due to a planned antigovernment rally and Mosaddeq's expected resistance (Kinzer, 2003, p. 163).

These objectives were seen, by many in the United States government, as a chance to deliver a catastrophic blow against the threat of communism and the growth of Soviet influence rather than a move to deliver a catastrophic blow against the current of democracy in the only recently independent states of the Middle East. There were others, however, that saw the coup for

what it was. Roger Goiran, the chief of the CIA station in Tehran, for example, had to be removed from his post due to vehement opposition to the coup—believing that Iranians would view the United States as a supporter of Anglo-French colonialism (Kinzer, 2003, p. 164). These dissenters were most often ignored, and occasionally, as with Goiran, removed from their proximity to Operation Ajax as the objectives of the operation continued to advance.

By August 1953, Roosevelt sought to utilize *firmands*, decrees signed by the Shah, that dismissed Mosaddeq and named Zahedi as his replacement. These *firmands* were believed to be the main pathways of legitimization of the coup for the population, as to utilize them would signal a respect for royal power and tradition (Kinzer, 2003, p. 168). After inciting another batch of intense rioting in Tehran, with both pro-government and anti-government protests under Roosevelt's orders, deals were made with prominent Muslim religious leaders to support the oncoming regime change. Meanwhile, Mosaddeq ordered the end of public demonstrations and mobilized soldiers for a crackdown against demonstrators—unwittingly allowing the targeting of Tudeh and nationalist factions by military officers bribed by US and British operatives as well as opening space for pro-Shah forces to take control of demonstrations. As military and police units loyal to Zehrani and US interests were taking control of Tehran, the Shah was preparing to resume monarchical control and Mosaddeq preparing to flee Tehran—effectively ending his democratic reign as Prime Minister (Kinzer, 2003, p. 186-187).

The overthrow of the democratically elected government of Mosaddeq at the cusp of political awareness in Iranian society undermined the entirety of the Shah's future regime—his influence could not compete with Mosaddeq's due to his ultimate lack of legitimacy. Thus a void in legitimacy was created that would be filled by political Islam and led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

The populace, despite the demonstrations that saw Mosaddeq's ousted from office, did not entail the public support the Shah believed it did. Rather, these demonstrations were consciously organized by overseers of Operation Ajax and ignored the anti-colonial nationalism that was organized by Mosaddeq only years earlier. The opposition to a government indebted to imperialist Western forces was inherently part of Iranian nationalism, and this nationalism developed as a centerpiece to the growth of political awareness and cemented the illegitimacy of imperial rule. Thus, the Shah and Prime Minister Zahedi could not attain a legitimate government with popular support following Mosaddeq's overthrow—forcing a turn to political oppression and authoritarianism.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, Mosaddeq was sentenced to a three year jail sentence, though he would ultimately spend the rest of his life under house arrest. Supporters and sympathizers of the National Front and Mosaddeq, along with other opposition figures in the religious community, were systematically arrested, tortured, and either imprisoned or given death sentences given their individual political magnitude. The Majlis, already operating under only limited authority and legislative powers, had its political power nullified, and the Shah, who had effectively eliminated opposition anyway, was able to create the image of a two-party system while retaining full control (Kinzer, 2003, p. 194).

During this political crackdown, the United States used their ties with the new regime in order to receive return on their investments in the coup. Notably, the US was given a forty percent share in the oil syndicate of Iran, and Great Britain was able to reinvest in the industry they had previously been removed from during nationalization. In addition to this, the Eisenhower administration believed bolstering the Shah's regime would be strategic in curbing

the spread of Soviet ideology throughout the Middle East—essentially, by using a harsh, authoritarian dictator to counter the appeal of a government of the people. Furthermore, the CIA aided in the creation of the Iranian intelligence agency, SAVAK, or what would become the hand of the Shah in delivering the terror in the foundations of the regime (Mousavian, 2014, p. 25).

Throughout the 1950's, massive military aid and advisors were sent to Iran from the United States, by the early 1960's the Shah had consolidated power through both the reach of SAVAK, the elimination of opposition leaders, and the consolidation of wealth among royalists and foreign business interests. However, the growing discontent among the population, particularly among Islamists and the politically conscious educated population, moved the Kennedy administration to urge the Shah to implement economic reforms to prevent widespread riots and revolution reminiscent of the 1953 coup. These economic reforms manifested in the White Revolution, a distinctly Western set of reforms based around privatization, secularism, and Western social values. With the distinct foreign nature of the reforms however, the population saw the White Revolution as disregard for the ingrained dissent to Western dominance, as well as disregard for traditional social and religious practices. Thus, the White Revolution opened the door for Islamists under Grand Ayatollah Khomeini to argue dissent against the reforms, and therefore the regime—culminating in his arrest by the Shah, and violent military response to the protests that followed (Mousavian, 2014, p. 27).

Looking to consolidate his power further, the Shah began to increase the influence and presence of the United States under the guise of increasing threats from surrounding Arab countries and the Soviet Union. With the Statute of Forces bill, US military personnel and their dependents were given full diplomatic immunity, and the Iranian population was given further

reason to express anti-American sentiment: the bill was not only highly reminiscent of the colonial era, but clearly infringed on Iranian sovereignty. Moreover, during Nixon's tenure, the role of Iran in acting as a buffer to Soviet expansionism was increased through more arms agreements, adding to the Shah's desire to increase military capacity to become and maintain the position of a regional powerhouse (Mousavian, 2014, p. 28).

Yet military buildup, economic expansion, Westernization, and brutal political oppression could not stem revolutionary sentiment. Jimmy Carter's election in 1976, based on a platform including the importance of human rights, threatened to change the tide of US-Iranian relations. Instead, however, meetings between the president and Shah rarely ventured into human rights territory, and Carter openly declared the Shah a friend of the United States. As revolutionary discontent grew throughout the late 1970's, the Carter administration largely ignored the Shah's handling of protests, and with the implementation of a military government in 1978, the administration gave full approval to the regime. The administration went so far as to send riot-control equipment, even as debate within the administration occurred over how to respond to the Iranian revolutionary movement (Kurzman, 1996).

Even so, the administration was unable to come to a decision before the revolution climaxed in 1979. Protestors began to appeal to soldiers during demonstrations, demonstrating national unity against foreign oppressors with slogans and methods to utilize Mosaddeq era nationalism:

...protestors handed flowers to soldiers and chanted slogans such as: "Brother soldier, why do you kill your brothers?" and "The army is part of the nation". On several occasions, large throngs of protestors persuaded soldiers to give up their arms, throw off

their uniforms, and join the demonstration... A number of soldiers, even officers, slipped out and joined protests-out of uniform, of course, because a uniform would attract dangerous attention from protestors and security forces that remained loyal. In early February of 1979, when whole units of troops began to demonstrate in uniform against the shah, the military's disintegration was imminent. After only a day and a half of street fighting, the chiefs of staff declared the military's "neutrality" and allowed the revolutionaries to take power (Kurzman, 1996).

It is important to note, at this point, that the regime maintained the traditional international and domestic support that had propped it up since 1953. State centralization and massive royalist wealth had been maintained, and the state was not obstructed in any way from utilizing the previous methods of opposition repression. Rather, the population was able to use the growth of opposition to increase political opportunities. The body of the revolution, that is, was largely dependent on revolutionaries using widespread opposition to the regime to entice non revolutionaries to join and expand the revolutionary faction, thus increasing both its presence in the political sphere of the country as well as its strength.

Furthermore, the body of the revolution was able to be mobilized by utilizing religious traditions and influence in the country. Though traditionally apolitical, the regime's support for moral and secular reforms that went contrary to traditional religious practice spurred the clergy into political activity. The religious sector of the revolution, led by the aforementioned Ayatollah Khomeini, was then able to gain the backing of the grassroots of society, who supported the clergy in their own apolitical lives and believed in Islamic social and moral traditions. Moreover, religious conservatives and those able to be persuaded to religious notions of revolution were



traditionally from poor and lower income segments of society—segments of society that had been further harmed by the regime’s indifference to social reform and justice (Mousavian, 2014, p. 29).

By January 1979, the revolutionary zeal of Iran forced the Shah to leave the country and hand over the government to Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar. Following this, however, Ayatollah Khomeini’s opposition to the prime minister opened the door for a full disintegration of the existing government, to be replaced, by referendum, by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The era of United States domination of Iranian affairs had ended, allowing an era of animosity between the two countries to begin.

The Islamic Republic of Iran mirrored the ideological characteristics of the revolution: anti-imperialist, nationalist, anti-dictatorship, and Islamist; however, relations with the United States were not immediately severed following the creation of the new regime. In fact, the only regimes Khomeini disavowed were South Africa, as an apartheid state, and Israel (Mousavian, 2014, p. 59). The US made motions to recognize the new revolutionary movement, but this new phase in Iran-US relations was brought to a standstill with the Iranian Hostage crisis, only months after the victory of the revolution. Throughout the Middle East, the United States had replaced France and Great Britain as the most visible imperial power. With the visibility of imperial tactics, nationalist and revolutionary movements were often ingrained with anti-Americanism as a method to maintain national sovereignty. Thus, even as this new era of relations between the two countries was set to begin, the deep-rooted anti-Americanism of the revolution manifested in the new regime sanctioning the seizure of the US embassy in response to the decision to admit Reza Shah into the country for medical care.

With aim to attract international attention to what was perceived as a United States conspiracy against the Iranian revolution and the new Islamist regime, the crisis marks the beginning of the prolonged consequences of US interventionism in the 1953 coup. Throughout the growth of the revolutionary movement, and following the creation of the Islamic Republic, every move by the United States, whether covert or open, was assessed with mistrust and with the coup in mind. Memories of Mosaddeq's overthrow created a widespread unease and uncertainty about United States' dedication to Iran's continued existence as a client state. Ayatollah Khomeini was a people's leader, but Mosaddeq had been one as well, and it had in no way stopped the United States from imposing an illegitimate government to affirm their own foreign policy interests. Furthermore, this deep mistrust of the United States combined with historical Iranian experience set in stone the prospect of prolonged conflict, with the United States seen under an "enemy narrative" in order to hold the ideological foundation of the state against a permanent adversary (Mousavian, 2014, p. 67). Thus, the 1953 coup fundamentally shaped the Iranian revolution and subsequent Islamic Republic, and further shaped regional policy by establishing the United States as an enemy to the sovereignty of Middle Eastern States.

On that point, within the Middle Eastern region, it is important to take note of the historical hostilities between Shiite and Sunni Muslim populations, and the destabilizing effect this can have throughout the region by creating prolonged conflict. The enemy narrative of the United States as a neocolonial and imperialist force reinforces itself in the prominence of Iranian influence throughout resistance movements in the Middle East, and the partially unifying force of this narrative in an unstable system. By weighing Islam as a whole against anti-Islamist forces, Iran has been able to boost its own position as a leader in the Islamic struggle against

Western imperialism. Thus, while sectarian conflicts still exist, much of the region has nonetheless united in at least one cause—the cause for Islamic autonomy against the United States and against Israel (Mousavian, 2014, p. 253). While the United States still finds allies in Sunni nations and regional powerhouses, particularly Turkey and Saudi Arabia, these alliances have created a regional power balance that Iran can utilize and exacerbate in times of conflict.

The most evident way, in the context of this paper, that Iran utilizes the political culture fostered by the Islamic regime is through soft power strategies:

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran have basically three ways to achieve influence in the region: military involvement, economic linkages, and dissemination of cultural and political norms. While all three states used military means, none of them have enough resources to establish dominance over other regional states through military means.

Furthermore, the US continues to have a significant military presence in the region and would use overwhelming power to prevent any changes opposing its interests (Ciftci, 2016).

The soft power strategies utilized, however, manifest in very different ways. In regards to Iran, the political legitimacy of the country's US allied rivals is often challenged by Iran's goals of Islamist Revolution. Shortly after the 1979 revolution, for example, Iranian leaders made extensive efforts to export the Islamic revolution to the surrounding region—believing, in part, that it was a crucial step of Middle Eastern autonomy from Western imperialism. Though Iran did not manage to trigger any revolutions, they were able to cause critical issues for the U.S. backed governments they were targeting—notably by funding and influencing groups ranging from anti-Israel revolutionaries to Shiite minorities and by creating appeal to their own political

structure—a populist theocracy. In this way, Iran was not only able to carry out indirect attacks against regional enemies, but undermine the safety and political capital of rivals through the sheer embarrassment of not being able to apprehend the violence (Long, 2007, p. 83).

Moreover, while Iran is not an Arab state, many Arab countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Palestine see massive Iranian political, social, and economic assistance for their revolutionary factions and autonomy from Western power politics. Further, despite not being an Arab state, much of this influence is attributed to unabating support for the Palestinian struggle, a district symbol of the violation of Middle Eastern and Islamic autonomy. With Israel propped up as a non-Muslim state upheld and supported by the United States, both under the enemy narrative, Iran has been able to foster the narrative of that Israel's long term goal is to silence and destroy the Muslim world (Mousavian, 2014, p. 253). Thus, under the pretense to revive Islamic dignity, struggle against those under the enemy narrative is a fundamentally unifying force for many political factions in the region, especially factions on the far right and left. Continued and unconditional support for Israel by the United States only reaffirms Iran's narrative, and allows ruling factions in the region to effectively call for non-compromise and non-cooperation against an ideological adversary. Countries allied with the United States are forced between the economic and political capital the alliance grants and the narrative of the US as an imperialist force.

Essentially, the combination of the enemy narrative and Iran as a force of anti-imperialist power give Iran massive regional influence:

Iran presents itself as a nonsectarian power “resistance” against the US imperialism and Israeli aggression in the region... Iran has a hybrid populist theocratic regime that has

proved to be more resilient than the Arab republican regimes and to be more participatory than the absolute Arab monarchies. As such, despite being a non-Arab nation, Iranian model may be appealing to pious individuals, to Shiites and to supporters of Islamic rule in the Arab Middle East (Ciftci, 2016).

That said, Iran has built an identity based on anti-American, Shiite theocracy, and in periods of increasing anti-Americanism, is able to weigh its own power against Saudi Arabia and Turkey. While Sunnis make up the overwhelming majority of Muslims, Iran's combination of Islamic theocracy, electoral competition, and populism create appeal to revolutionary religious factions throughout the region that seek to undermine states with deeply held American ties, and ultimately seeks to undermine American hegemony in the region (Ciftci, 2016).

This has, over the course of the past several decades, manifested itself through Iran's nuclear program. Started under the Shah's regime, the program was halted after the 1979 revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini declared that chemical warfare was *haram*, or forbidden by *sharia*. With Khomeini's death in 1989, the program was resumed under his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei. Khamenei and his Islamic Revolutionary Party declared that it was the holy mission of Iranians to export the Islamist revolution to the surrounding region. Furthermore, a "nuclear umbrella" would dissuade the United States from punishing Iran for not only their own revolution, but the Islamic revolutions throughout the region they hoped would soon come. While the nuclear program was unsponsored until Khamenei, the idea of revolutionary export was introduced under Khomeini. These revolutions would not only put regimes in line with their Islamic duty, but would undermine the international political order that was grounded on the global injustice against Muslims and other developing peoples (Rezaei, 2017). Furthermore, it

would undermine the political order of the region by challenging the legitimacy of countries allied with the West:

By embarking on a high-profile revolutionary export venture, Khomeini's government challenged the legitimacy of neighboring countries. It was hardly helpful that some high-ranking government officials took to claim that states in the region were not entirely sovereign and should not be allowed to pursue an independent foreign policy, at least not with regard to the United States and its allies. Needless to say, the upheaval alarmed not only the rulers of the countries targeted but also their ally, the United States (Rezaei, 2017).

Thus, the addition of the nuclear program to the idea of exporting the revolution allowed Iran to advance its interests in the face of other regional powerhouses allied with the United States. With Iran's combined support for revolutionary movements across the surrounding region and historical feud with Israel, the nuclear program threatened the stability of a two-pronged regional order: Israel with its Western allies and Iran with its widespread support for anti-Israeli groups. Though funding groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah had created a definitive effort against Israel, the creation of a nuclear arsenal against Israel's own arsenal, though unacknowledged for the most part, would be significant mark in regional standing and power. Not only would this create a theoretical deterrent for the large swath of enemy territory surrounding Israel—a swath of territory largely inhabited by groups hostile to Israel but supported by Iran—but it would ultimately increase Iran's image and power of a figure standing against the west for Islamic autonomy. The presence of a nuclear arsenal in the hands of a Muslim country would signal the sovereignty of the Muslim world against the West, and would

further threaten the legitimacy of U.S. backed governments in the region as purveyors of the imperial period.

### Conclusion

The joint effort by the United States and Great Britain to overthrow Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953 has been a massive indicator to the current political culture of the Iranian government, both as it has manifested through the implementation of the Islamic Republic and how it has manifested through the utilization of the political culture to further regional goals. The imposition of Mohammad Shah Pahlavi by the United States removed the legitimacy of the regime and fostered anti-American sentiment that would shape the corresponding revolution. In this way, the Islamic Republic of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Khamenei were able to shape and utilize regional policy around the anti-imperialist and anti-Americanism sentiment that had culminated in the 1979 Revolution and had thus become an integrate part of Iranian political culture.

By using Islam as the overwhelming symbol and force against Western imperialism, Iran was able to gain political capital, standing, and legitimacy throughout the region as a leader in the fight for Muslim autonomy against anti-Islamists. The regime's structure as a populist theocracy not only upholds the ideal for many populations across the region of a sort of Islamist democracy, but undermines the governmental structures of their regional rivals through resilience and participatory nature. Additionally, by having the historic ability to present the United States under an enemy narrative and export this idea to the surrounding region, Iran is able to further undermine regional rivals and US backed governments and groups by questioning their legitimacy as well as their commitment to Islamic autonomy against the United States and Israel.

In the same way, the funding and assistance to anti-Israel groups and anti-Western groups solidifies the country's image as the leading presence in the Islamic world for Islamic autonomy, just as the nuclear program would put Iran on the world stage in advocating and protecting the Muslim world.

Overall, Iran has been able to capitalize on the anti-Americanism built up from the 1953 coup of Mosaddeq by presenting itself as a regional alternative to Western influence, a regional ideal for Islamic revolution, and a regional protector for those fighting against Western power and influence.



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