

1941-1951, Iran: "Making Sheeps' Eyes" at Anglo Oil

During World War II, Britain and the Soviet Union jointly invaded Iran in September 1941 to establish a supply route to the Soviet army. The invading forces quickly overpowered the Iranian army and forced Reza Shah out of power, who had established relations with the Germans. Reza Shah was replaced by the British by his twenty one year old son, Muhammad Reza Pahlvai. When the U.S. entered the war, U.S. troops were also sent to Iran.

In 1942, to balance the British and Russian presence in Iran, the U.S. established the U.S. Mission to the Iranian Gendarmerie (GENMISH) and the U.S. Mission to the Iranian Army (ARMISH). Under Article 20 of the agreement between Iran and the U.S. in 1943, the head of GENMISH exercised executive control over Iran's internal security force of 25,000 men. He reported directly to the minister of the interior in Tehran. Brigadier General Norman H. Schwarzkopf (father of the U.S. general during the 1991 war) was the head of GENMISH and the Gendarmerie. Appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt, Schwarzkopf virtually ruled the large Iranian force of internal security police (SAVAK).

In 1947, Schwarzkopf confidently wrote that by the end of 1948 (when the Gendarmerie agreement was to expire) he expected to have the force sufficiently organized to make U.S. military command unnecessary. During an audience with the Shah, Schwarzkopf insisted on increasing the Gendarmerie to 40,000 men. The monarch expressed fear that it would become the prime minister's private army, Schwarzkopf replied that the nation required such a force because his men had to do much of the work of the army. The general even had control of the Iranian Parliament, the *Majlis*, through control of 88 votes in it. He boasted about this to Wiley, the U.S. ambassador to Iran (James Goode, *The United States and Iran*, 1946-51).

In 1947 and 1948, the U.S. embassy staff grew considerably, enhancing diplomatic, commercial and cultural interactions between the two nations. The Office of Strategic Services [predecessor of the CIA] established a



Franklin Roosevelt wrote to Winston Churchill, in March 1943:

"I am having the oil studied by the Department of State and my oil experts, but please do accept my assurances that I am not making sheeps' eyes at your oil fields in Iraq or Iran."

Prime Minister Churchill responded:

"Thank you very much for your assurances about no sheeps' eyes at our oil fields in Iran and Iraq. Let me reciprocate by giving you fullest assurances that we have not thought of trying to horn in upon your interests or property in Saudi Arabia."

Source: James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of Iranian-American Relations*, 1988.

station in Tehran using U.S. military attachés and embassy political officers as cover. Their covert operations included intelligence-gathering and propaganda operations aimed at the USSR and its allies in Iran, cross-border espionage and subversion raids into Soviet territory, and efforts to map out escape and evasion routes and organize "stay-behind" guerrilla networks in the event of a Soviet invasion.

In the late 1940s, unrest began growing steadily among the politically active in Iran. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), a British-owned firm was earning large profits from its monopoly over Iran's oil industry. In 1949, a group of prominent political figures established the National Front (NF) to press for political reforms and to nationalize the AIOC's assets. The NF was extremely popular and elected eight of its members to the *Majlis* in late 1949. The NF was led by Muhammad Mussadiq, a charismatic *Majlis* deputy from a wealthy land-owning family who was an ardent nationalist and democrat. By all accounts, it seems that Mussadiq was brought into power with U.S. help because:

- Britain had the oil monopoly in Iran and Mussadiq called for an end to this by calling for its nationalization.
- Mussadiq was from a prominent land-owning family from prominent

tribes. Schwarzkopf was working with many of these tribes to prepare them to take a more active role in the Iranian government. Schwarzkopf developed considerable influence over the *Majlis*.

- The U.S. government renewed their global strategy of containing Soviet influence. It concluded that a major effort was needed to prevent Iran's communist party from coming to power. The answer to communism was the nationalist Mussadiq.
- Mussadiq's predecessor, Razmara, was brought in with U.S. blessing but turned anti-American. Razmara was then assassinated. After the assassination, the *Majlis* nominated Mussadiq for the premiership.

After Mussadiq assumed office, the President Truman's administration publicly expressed strong support for him; recognizing that he could serve an effective alternative to Iran's communist party. "Washington concluded that Iran must be kept in the Western camp at all costs because of its strategic location and that a protracted oil crisis might weaken the U.S. economy and threaten U.S. and Western security. For the remainder of Truman's term the administration supported Mussadiq, opposed British efforts to overthrow him and attempted to mediate an agreement to satisfy both par-

ties to the oil dispute and minimize disruption of the world oil market.”

The U.S. brought Mussadiq to power, so that U.S. could obtain their share of Iran’s oil wealth. After assuming power, the first thing Mussadiq did was nationalize oil on April 29, 1951. This posed a threat to Britain’s weak economy and dwindling prestige, and initiated a confrontation between Britain and Iran. This led Britain to start covert operations in Iran. Britain persuaded major world oil companies to boycott Iranian oil exports. Britain also imposed a series of bilateral economic sanctions on Iran and began an ominous military buildup in the region.

In September 1951, British officials began implementing a plan to invade southwestern Iran and seize the oil fields. When U.S. officials were told about this plan, President Harry Truman notified British Prime Minister Clement Attlee that the U.S. would not support an invasion and urged him to resume negotiations with Iran over the oil dispute. As a result, Attlee was forced to abandon the invasion plan, telling his cabinet that “in view of the



Brigadier General Norman H. Schwarzkopf Sr.

1917: graduated from Westpoint and then fought in WWI.

1921-1936: formed and led New Jersey's State Police (played a key role in Lindbergh kidnapping case).

late-1930s: Narrated the popular weekly "GangBusters" radio show.

1942-1946: Organized Iran's national police force and the Imperial Iranian Gendarmerie.

1948: Military Police, Frankfurt.

1953: Aided the CIA coup in Iran

1991: His son, "Stormin' Norman" led the U.S. war against Iraq.

For details of Norman Schwarzkopf Sr.'s WWII role in Iran, see T.H. Vail Motter's *The Middle East Theater: The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia* (1952). <www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/wwii/persian>

attitude of the U.S. government, [he did not] think it would be expedient to use force” in Iran. Soon after the oil nationalization law was enacted, U.S. officials began to implement a plan to ease the effect of the British oil blockade on the world oil market. Under this plan, U.S. oil companies were asked to provide oil to U.S. allies that had been adversely affected by the block-

ade. Although this was intended to help stabilize the world oil market, it also reinforced the oil blockade, weakened the Iranian economy and undermined Mussadiq’s popular support.

Source: Excerpt, “Iran and the Revolution: An exposure of the American Plans” <www.angelfire.com/mi/shebaab/iran1.html>

“Running’ Iran” and Running out the Brits

By Gregory J. Rosmaita

By the time Americans actively began their participation in WWII, the USSR and the British had almost completely dismantled the Iranian state. Both enjoyed the support of sycophants and allies which they bought through investment, bribes, armaments, etc. To further ensure that the *Majlis* [Parliament] remained fractured, the occupying powers supplied many of Iran’s myriad political parties with varying degrees of support – both overt and covert; material, financial and political.

By August 1942, the level of U.S. engagement in Iran was so great that FDR’s Adviser on Political Relations, Wallace Murray (former Chief of the State Department’s Division of Near Eastern Affairs) noted in a memorandum to President Roosevelt that: “It seems to me that the present political crisis in Iran... is of such vital concern to us that we cannot ignore it. The obvious fact is that we shall soon be in the position of actually ‘running’ Iran

through an impressive body of American advisers.” Murray’s memo reveals the extent of the U.S. presence in Iran: U.S. officers had assumed “full control” of the Iranian Army; had begun to “organize and run the gendarmerie

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Wallace Murray, FDR’s Political Relations Adviser (1942)

of the country which will guarantee internal security;” and former commander of the New Jersey State Police, Norman H. Schwarzkopf, had been dispatched to “to re-organize the police forces of Iran.” By the end of 1943, more than 70 other U.S. military and non-military advisors were in Iran, coordinating and/or overseeing the ministries of Finance, Treasury, Food and Price Stabilization, as well as the national bank and the customs service.

The State Department’s Near Eastern Division considered Britain as great a potential threat to the post-war peace as the Soviets. The British threat would be primarily economic. Thus, England could no more be allowed to wield unlimited authority in Iran than could the USSR. To allow the UK to reimpose its maritime monopoly over the Persian Gulf would compromise U.S. economic interests in the region

In January 1943, the U.S. established the Persian Gulf Command (PGC). By April, the PGC assumed full control from the British over the delivery of lend-lease supplies to the USSR through Iran. The PGC consisted of 30,000 Americans in uniform. The Shah signed an agreement for the U.S. would train and equip Iran’s national police force, the gendarmerie.

Source: “Strange Menagerie: The Atlantic Charter as the Root of American Entanglement in Iran and Its Influence Upon the Development of the Policy of Containment, 1941-1946” (1999) <www.hicom.net/~oedipus/us_iran.html>