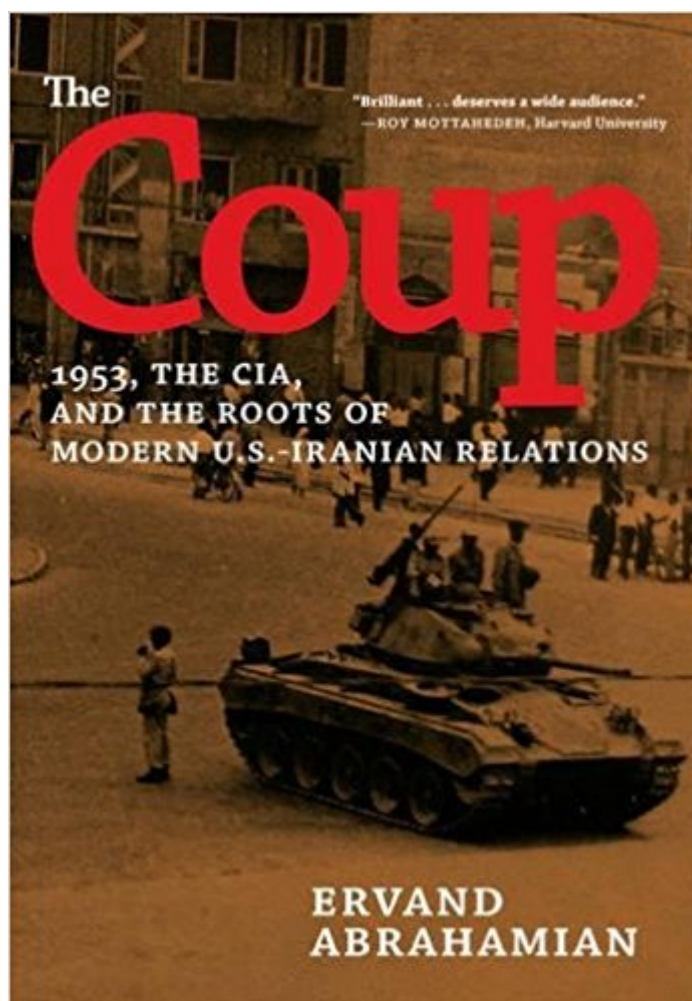


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The Coup: 1953, The CIA, And The Roots Of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations



Synopsis

In August 1953, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated the swift overthrow of Iran's democratically elected leader and installed Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in his place. Over the next twenty-six years, the United States backed the unpopular, authoritarian shah and his secret police; in exchange, it reaped a share of Iran's oil wealth and became a key player in this volatile region. The blowback was almost inevitable, as this new and revealing history of the coup and its consequences shows. When the 1979 Iranian Revolution deposed the shah and replaced his puppet government with a radical Islamic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the shift reverberated throughout the Middle East and the world, casting a long, dark shadow over U.S.-Iran relations that extends to the present day. In this authoritative new history of the coup and its aftermath, noted Iran scholar Ervand Abrahamian uncovers little-known documents that challenge conventional interpretations and also sheds new light on how the American role in the coup influenced U.S.-Iranian relations, both past and present. Drawing from the hitherto closed archives of British Petroleum, the Foreign Office, and the U.S. State Department, as well as from Iranian memoirs and published interviews, Abrahamian's riveting account of this key historical event will change America's understanding of a crucial turning point in modern U.S.-Iranian relations.

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Customer Reviews

A Choice magazine Outstanding Academic Title selection #147;The CIA-sponsored coup in 1953

that deposed Muhammad Mossadeq, Iran's popular prime minister, is often noted as a failure of interventionist foreign policy. In this slim, readable volume, Iran scholar Abrahamian (*A History of Modern Iran*) delves into the genesis and aftermath of that operation, challenging the idea that Mossadeq's intransigence made the putsch inevitable. Making extensive use of recently declassified diplomatic cables and the archives of multinational oil companies—especially the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now BP—the author makes the case that the U.K. and the U.S., unwilling to back down over the hard issue of nationalization [of the oil industry]... were the main stumbling blocks in the relationship between Iran and the West. . . . his primer skillfully weaves together primary sources to tell an engaging tale of the machinations, intrigues, and personalities at the heart of the crisis.

—Publishers Weekly "Abrahamian has done for Iran what de Tocqueville did for France."

—Edward Mortimer, author of *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, on Ervand Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran* "A relevant, readable study of the foreign-engineered 1953 Iranian coup reminds us of the cause that won't go away: oil."

—Kirkus "In this thorough, well-researched work, Abrahamian (Iranian & Middle Eastern history & politics, CUNY) breaks down the generally accepted understanding of the details behind the 1953 CIA-run coup that ousted Iran's prime minister, Muhammad Mossadeq, and supported the shah. The author reveals some of the primary motivations behind the current Iranian hostility toward the United States and other Western governments. Through his well-documented research, Abrahamian paints a picture of the coup in the context of British and U.S. oil interests, contrasting these motivations with the desire to curb the spread of Soviet influences. In his examination of information recently made available from the British Foreign Office, the U.S. Department of State, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now BP), and other government documents, Abrahamian pieces together the intricacies of the relationships among these parties and provides a sound argument for the control of oil resources as the dominating issue behind the coup. VERDICT This latest research from Abrahamian is a must read for anyone wanting a clearer understanding of the history behind current U.S.-Iranian relations. Recommended for Middle East history enthusiasts and specialists, as well as those seeking a full understanding of current international affairs."

—Library Journal

Ervand Abrahamian is the author of several books, including *Tortured Confessions*, *Khomeinism*, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, and *A History of Modern Iran*. He is Distinguished Professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern History and Politics at the City University of New York. He lives in Brooklyn.

The best book so far I ever read it about Cia Coup in Iran

Abrahamian writes in an engaging and disciplined way. His interpretation of the coup is supported by ample evidence. He makes a compelling case for re-examining the legacy of Mossadeq and the United States in Iran and the wider world.

This is a true to form Ervand Abrahamian. It is an extremely well researched and referenced piece of history writing. Abrahamian fills the gaps that were left to imagination or at best to the leaked rumors after the Coup. It is an addendum to both his earlier books, *Iran Between two Revolutions* and *A History of Modern Iran*. The book provides unshakable evidence of the CIA's direct involvement in the coup, return of the Shah and strangulation of a budding democracy in Iran. It also hopefully puts a stop to the arguments of the "Coup Deniers" who have used the present regime's mildly stated misdeeds to distort the facts. Undeniably reading the book takes time, despite its small size. The reason is absorption of the references and the unfamiliarity of some of the characters involved, long gone. It should be a book to have and read time and again. To keep the memories alive, to remind further actors who keep inventing the wheel again and again of repeating the same mistakes and to realize the Red Thread that extends from that historical event to today's Middle East and the blowback it created for the United States. It is a sad but excellent book, but so is history.

As primary documents have become available after 1990, there have been several studies of the coup that overthrew the Iranian prime minister in 1953, Muhammed Mossadeq. The fundamental issue revealed in the sources has been that of oil; the Iranian parliamentary government insisted on nationalizing Iran's oil in order to control its natural resources. Abrahamian focuses on the issue of control to demonstrate that it was the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) that was most inflexible, whereas Mossadeq was more ready to accept a modest compromise, especially one that was offered up by the US regime. But the UK, owner of a majority of the AIOC's stock, took a very hard line from the onset and was meddling in Iranian politics for several years prior to 1953 to water down or otherwise secure its control of Iranian oil, a control it had had since the beginnings of oil prospecting and production in 1906. By 1952 the UK was actively seeking to de-stabilize the Iranian parliamentary regime and had developed a plan for a military led coup, Operation Boot; when relations between Iran and the UK soured after July 1952, the UK's MI6 passed its planning and

operatives to the USA and the CIA for implementation in 1953 as Operation Ajax. Abrahamian utilizes the major known sources well: the files of the AIOC and the international oil producers (the Seven Sisters), the documents of the UK that have been de-classified under the 30 year rules, and the US records, some de-classified State Dept. Records as well as some CIA memos and memoirs that have become available since especially 2000. There is plenty of long quoted passages from these primary sources to provide the evidence for Abrahamian's arguments. But Abrahamian also offers a nice analysis of the historical literature on the coup, showing how the interpretations have evolved. The early accounts were mainly official justifications reflecting President Eisenhower's speech on the coup, that Iran was faltering into instability that could have led to communism and the US could not sit by and watch that happen. The Shah became a central figure as a cornerstone of support for the West against communist threats to Iran and the Middle East. The advent of the Islamic Republic and the collapse of the Shah in 1979 saw the first major revisions by historians, who discovered Mossadeq as an alternative to both the Shah and Khomeini. Since then analysis has focused on the rise and fall of Mossadeq and the National Front and the origins of the coup. Abrahamian emphasizes the issue of control over Iran's oil reserves as the crucial point of the contest and argues that Mossadeq's position was more flexible than that of the UK and the oil producers. That the fall of Mossadeq brought on the revolution of the Islamic Republic, the end of the shahs, and the advent of Islamic fundamentalism is a widely shared perspective now.

This book provides the complete story of the coup; the events leading up to it as well as those following it. It gives the reader some idea of what Mossadeq had to contend with; from enemies both within the government and those outside the government. From Churchill's efforts to convert the British fleet to oil to Eisenhower's excessive fear of Russian communism. Add to that the CIA and the oil companies efforts to maximize profits. It also tells the story of what eventually became British Petroleum. If only the U.S. had supported Mossadeq.

Every Iranian already has an idea what went down in 1953 CIA coup against a democratically elected Government. I recommend this book for anyone who likes to understand the events leading to and the aftermath of the CIA coup.

This is one of the best academic works I have read on the 1953 coup. The main strength of the book is the references which gives a detailed account of the coup. Read it if you want to know more about the middle east as it is.

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