

Chapter 2

British Retaliation After the Nationalisation of Iran's Oil

Abstract The efforts of the Majlis to nationalise the oil industry strained Iran's relations with Britain and led to a catastrophe as the latter took extraordinary measures to maintain *status quo* and to secure their enormous Iranian assets. They refused to comply with the Iranian government and launched aggressive responses including the filing of an official complaint against Dr. Mosaddeq's government with the *International Court of Justice* (ICJ) to which the court responded saying Iran had an oil agreement with a British company rather than with the British government. The case was deemed unsuitable for a court established as an arbiter between governments. Thereafter, British warships in the Persian Gulf stopped the passage of all Iranian oil tankers, thus forming a blockade to prevent all foreign trade. In addition, the larger international oil companies joined the embargo over growing concerns that the nationalisation of Iran's oil would set an undesirable precedent. The British launched intelligence operations with a view to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq's government when all negotiation attempts collapsed. Their spies even selected a new PM and purchased the support of opposition groups. Eventually, and especially after the expulsion of British workers, the boycott yielded untenable economic and political results. What follows is a detailed retrospective review of these and related events.

Keywords *Oil Nationalization Law (ONL)* • *International Court of Justice (ICJ)* • Negotiations • Propaganda • Oil boycott

2.1 Apparent Calm: Negotiations

After the approval of the ONL, exchanges between the British and Iranian governments prevented Iran from nationalising its oil. Tehran informed the British that the ONL had been approved by a majority and that the OC had already begun its study for the execution of the law. With constant encouragement from Dr. Mosaddeq, the OC submitted its final report on the execution of oil nationalisation to the Majlis, which approved the law on 28 April 1951 (7 Ordibehesht

1330). It was then approved by the Senate on 29 April 1951. Although Britain was prepared to acknowledge the steps taken by Iran to nationalise the AIOC, it sought a solution that would not affect the industry's operations.

Immediately after Iran passed the implementation procedures on 1 May 1951 (10 Ordibehesht 1330), Britain responded. When Dr. Mosaddeq came to power, both the AIOC and the British government strongly objected, arguing that the Iranian action was a 'unilateral breach of the 1933 Contract.' The British objection was expected, as their most significant holding was the AIOC refinery in Abadan (EP1534/36A). They seemed to have believed that the oil was 'theirs' since 'they' had discovered it. In the first eight months after oil nationalisation, a second round of direct talks between British and Iranian representatives took place in Tehran, accompanied by a round of indirect talks in USA.

First, the British Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, and Clement Attlee (Prime Minister of Britain's Labour government) sent a message to Dr. Mosaddeq through the Iranian ambassador in London requesting a resumption of negotiations between the Iranian government and the AIOC. On 8 May 1951 (17 Ordibehesht 1330), the AIOC representative in Tehran requested an arbitration of the dispute by a referee based on the content of the 1933 Contract (Fātih 2005: 524). Iran's ministry of finance replied on 20 May 1951 (29 Ordibehesht 1330) that the nationalisation of industries was based on the jurisdiction of a sovereign nation and international contracts in the private sector, even if correct and legal, could not prevent the execution of a sovereign right. Thus, Iran's oil nationalisation could not be referred for arbitration. Subsequently, the oil company announced its willingness to negotiate with the Iranian government on 3 June 1951 (12 Khordad 1330).

On 11 June 1951 (20 Khordad 1330), a council of representatives from the oil company, with Mr. Basil R Jackson (deputy chairman, AIOC) as head, arrived in Tehran to negotiate with the Iranian government (EP1534/39). The team included Sir Thomas Gardiner (British representative of the AIOC), Mr. Elkington (AIOC principal between 1948 and 1956) and Richard Seddon (AIOC representative in Tehran). In addition, Flett and Butler joined the delegation (EP1531/666 20 June 1951). Simultaneously, Basil Jackson had been instructed to monitor oil shipments (EP1531/667, 19 June 1951; EP1531/670, 21 June 1951). The team met with their Iranian counterparts on at least three occasions (FO and WD, From Tehran to FO, Nc 650, 15 June 1951; FO and WD, From FO to Tehran, No 549, 16 June 1951; EP1531/663 19 June 1951). Concurrently, a series of communiqués of the foreign office (FO) in London discussed approaches to optimise results. After the first meeting, Jackson was given two options by the FO: to either continue or cease discussions (FO and WD, From Tehran to FO, Nc. 650, 15 June 1951). Jackson chose to proceed.

A major point of his counter proposal was to make an immediate payment of £10 million to the Iranian government in addition to £3 million payable monthly during the negotiations. Next, Jackson wished to establish a new company and transfer all of AIOC's assets to it as a subsidiary under AIOC, controlled by Iran. Finally, all of AIOC's businesses would be transferred to the new Iranian company. However, the FO and AIOC generally agreed that Iranian demands were 'wholly unacceptable'.

We consider that the Persian demand is wholly unacceptable. We understand from the United States Embassy that the State Department have characterised it as ‘completely unreasonable ... designed to remove all hope of negotiations except on terms of complete capitulation,’ and have suggested to Grady that he should approach the Shah with a view to securing its modification (FO and WD, From FO to Tehran, No 549, 16 June 1951).

On 19 June 1951 (28 Khordad 1330), the final meeting was held between government representatives and the British company’s council. Iran was represented by Muḥammad ‘Alī Vārastah (secretary of the Treasury), Engineer Ḥasībī (deputy secretary of the Treasury), Sanjābī (minister of culture), Yūsuf Mashār (minister of post and telegraph), and Dr. Shāyigān (representative of the mixed commission on oil).¹ Basil Jackson’s proposals were “turned down flat” as Iran considered them completely unfair and not in agreement with the ONL (EP1531/668; EP1534/39). The British believed otherwise, even if the proposal did not totally conform to the ONL; they deemed it applicable to the principle of nationalisation and that, as such, it adjusted fairly to the law’s interpretation. Mr. Jackson also suggested that Iran’s council expected far too much from the company’s representatives. Details of the proceedings were sent to the FO in London and after an hour the meeting adjourned (EP1531/663, 19 June 1951): “AIOC’s proposal, consistent with the principals of nationalization, has been rejected” (EP1531/676, 18 June 1951). Immediately, Basil Jackson left Tehran (EP1531/664, 21 June 1951) for London via Istanbul. He is reported to have said in London that “as long as Dr. Mosaddeq remains in power, there is no hope for renewed talks”. However, an option that was considered at the time was to initiate operation ‘MIDGET’ (EP1531/666, 20 June 1951).

On 20 June 1951 (29 Khordad 1330), Herbert Morrison read the oil company’s proposals to the Iranian government in the British House of Commons (Hansard-UK Parliament, *Anglo-Iranian Oil Fields*, HL Deb, 21 March 1951). He stated that they had considered making immediate payments to the Iranian government to eliminate essential financial needs; accepted the principle of the industry’s nationalisation and experienced fruitful cooperation with the Iranian government. He further stated that the British “had always proposed new plans which enabled larger profit shares for the Iranians, we remained convinced that a solution could be reached by negotiations which will safeguard the interests of both countries” (EP1531/668). Dr. Mosaddeq, on his part, had demanded that negotiations be based on the precise rules of the ONL, having accepted the premiership on the sole condition that the law was approved. On 21 June 1951 (30 Khordad 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq officially reported the lengthy negotiation process and reasons for its failure to the Majlis and called for a vote of confidence. The Majlis immediately gave the government a vote of confidence with 91 of 92 representatives in favour.

¹On 13 May 1951 (22 Ordibehesht 1330), five deputies have been selected to serve on the Mixed Commission on Oil (the Mixed Oil Commission) set up under the ONL by the Majlis. The members of the Mixed Oil Commission were: Duktur Shāyigān, Duktur Mu‘azzamī, Ḥusayn Makkī, Nāsir Ardalān, Allāhyār Šālīḥ.

The Iranian government then decided to take *total* control of the oil company, which had changed its name to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). Officials were hired for different sections of the company's operations and shops as Dr. Mosaddeq announced that he could not neglect the law that expressed Iranian will and determination. Thus, the government decided to execute the law immediately and approve a Mixed Commission on oil for necessary decisions from the council of ministers (the cabinet). It was also decided to continue executive actions to enforce the ONL.

The temporary board of directors of the NIOC announced that all workers of all nationalities were allowed to continue to work for it. Ships to which oil had been delivered were to provide a receipt to the company and those that did not were not permitted to leave. In response to these decisions and actions, on 26 June 1951 (4 Tir 1330), the British foreign minister announced in the House of Commons that all British oil cargo ships were ordered to leave Abadan even if it meant offloading already loaded oil.

Iran planned to export oil independently but the British explicitly demonstrated through various statements that they would do everything to prevent it. No agreement had yet been achieved through negotiations and on 30 June 1951 (8 Tir 1330), Morrison informed Dr. Mosaddeq that the Iranian government was responsible for closing the petroleum company and for all consequences, including massive loss of income and jobs.

Dr. Mosaddeq, nevertheless, insisted on full independence from all foreign intervention. He believed the oil profits were a unique solution to Iran's poverty and belonged to the people of Iran. He never took British statements and opposition seriously and was completely confident that USA would support him. At the time, USA was emphatically conveying its unqualified support for the freedom and sovereignty of nations on a global scale. On 12 July 1951 (20 Tir 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq formally asked President Truman to mediate between Britain and Iran (Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 1979: 308–309), which gave USA fertile ground for direct intervention.

Consequently, another round of discussions began after Mr. William Averell Harriman, Mr. William M. Rountree (head of Middle East in the state department) and Mr. Walter Levy (oil expert) arrived in Tehran on 15 July 1951 (23 Tir 1330). Mr. Harriman spent a few days in 'high discussions' with Dr. Mosaddeq and high-level Iranian officials of the Mixed Commission on oil. On 23 July (31 Tir), Dr. Mosaddeq announced an agreement to renew negotiations with the British on the condition that the British government accepted oil nationalisation as earlier suggested and as approved by the special oil committee of the Majlis and thus legally binding on 20 March 1951 (29 Esfand 1329).

Dr. Mosaddeq also agreed that British officials could attend negotiations as representatives of the previous joint-venture company (Britain and Iran), the AIOC. The British had accepted this proposal but when Averell Harriman arrived in Tehran, violent protests erupted and the Iranian military forces ended up killing or injuring several hundred people. To understand the impact of this event, we quote Dr. Mosaddeq's address to the Majlis: "British agents in the Majlis, British agents

in the government, British agents in society, British agents in Durbar—they are everywhere.”² Dr. Mosaddeq knew that “MI6 officers, particularly Norman Darbyshire, had occasionally made payments to deputies in the Majlis” (Louis 2004: 140). He even fired Zahedi, minister of the interior, for receiving such bribes.

In retrospect, this horrendous incident was the first coup attempt against Dr. Mosaddeq by anti-nationalists under Zahedi’s auspices. After Harriman’s arrival, anti-imperialist protests (15 July/23 Tir) were supported by the Tudeh party and began in Tehran with a mob attacking people in Bahāristān Square. A special council appointed by the government to investigate the matter concluded that members ascribed to the National Front had attended the protest. They denied any relation with the National Front but had, in fact, received presents from Arfa’.³ Dr. Mosaddeq was aware of conditions and properly assessed the incident and circumstances. He immediately discharged Zahedi⁴ and replaced him on 5 August 1951 (13 Mordad 1330) with Amīr ‘Alāyī whom he introduced to the Majlis. Zahedi seemed to have begun suppressing the Tudeh Party and the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist sentiment among certain sections of the populace. These events not only shocked Dr. Mosaddeq’s government but also served to affect the unity within the National Front. Subsequent evidence showed that all troublemaking elements of the National Front had supported Zahedi’s attempted coup.

At the same time, Mr. Richard Stokes (Lord Privy Seal in the Labour cabinet of Clement Attlee, 1951), arrived in Tehran on 4 August 1951 (12 Mordad 1330) to head the second British team for negotiations. Initially, he aimed to continue exporting oil based on a temporary agreement with Iran to prevent loss of customers. However, his Iranian counterparts did not accept temporary contracts. On 13 August (21 Mordad), after several meetings, Lord Stokes delivered a counter offer with eight measures; essentially, it was an updated version of the earlier Jackson proposal. The Stokes proposal included the creation of an organisation that would have a monopoly on the purchase of oil on behalf of the former AIOC; the creation of an operating agency to act on behalf of the AIOC, composed of British

²Rūznāmah-i Rasmī-i Kishvar 27 September 1951 (4 Mehr 1330).

³*Bākhtar-i Imrūz News*, 5 September 1951 (13 Shahrivar 1330).

⁴Aḥmad Malikī wrote about those meetings after the *coup*: “I clearly remember in one of our lunch meeting, in Ḥiṣārak-i Shimīrānāt, Zahedi’s house, in the presence of Makkī and a couple more members of the National Front. In that meeting, Zahedi pointed out about disharmony and lack of agreement between members of the National Front and reminded them that the party could become the core of a national centre if they could efficiently purify the membership. We explained that Dr. Mosaddeq, despite his honesty and good intentions, was a stubborn mulish person who would eventually become a dictator” (Malikī 1953: 12). Therefore, Right-wing members of the National Front designed to conspire against him during secret meetings that began a year prior to his appointment as PM. They planned to purify the National Front in line with their bias as spies for Zahedi. After Dr. Mosaddeq came to power and appointed Zahedi as Minister of the Interior, the conspiracy’s core strengthened. Relations between members became firm and its destructive activities intensified and continued during the government of Dr. Mosaddeq until they reached their goal on 19 August 1953 (28 Mordad 1332).

staff with Persian representation on its board and a 50–50 profit sharing arrangement (Norouzi/Norouzi 2011).

As an updated version of the Jackson proposal, these points can be summarised as follows: First, the AIOC would transfer its holdings to the NIOC but the latter had to pay compensation. Next, to arrange the export of Iranian oil, both parties would form a new company that would have a long-term contract with the NIOC. While the NIOC gave full freedom to sell oil to principal customers in Europe, the Middle East and Latin America (EP1531/673, 18 June 1951), its actions should not prejudice the interests of the newly established company but should serve to help the NIOC manage oil operations in Iran. The last point was NIOC's 50–50 profit sharing with the new company. The Iranian government studied the proposal and realised it contravened the ONL and even the previous agreement made with Harriman. Iran's rejection of the proposal was inevitable.

The Iranian government would only agree to the following three terms: first, purchasing oil for British needs; second, the settlement of all legitimate claims made by the Iranian government on AIOC and third, the continued employment of British oil experts and engineers. On continuation of a series of discussions, Lord Stokes agreed that the board of directors of the NIOC would take charge of managing the industry. Dr. Mosaddeq then agreed to hiring first-class experts from neutral countries as new members of the board of directors. However, Lord Stokes then countered by claiming that British experts were unwilling to work under *non-British* directors and preferred to appoint a British CEO.

The British recognised the principle of nationalisation but they continued to protest about the manner in which it was implemented. They would accept nationalisation as an accomplished fact if the Iranians agreed to provide acceptable compensation. However, they also insisted that the oil industry be run efficiently (Louis 2004: 148).

Dr. Mosaddeq decided to postpone the discussion on the CEO, but Lord Stokes insisted that 'discussing other matters was useless' before resolving the matter. The British thus remained inflexible. On 21 August 1951 (29 Mordad 1330), Lord Stokes wrote to Dr. Mosaddeq to inform him that if Iran did not accept this condition, negotiations would cease immediately. On 22 August (30 Mordad), Dr. Mosaddeq delivered a report on these matters to the Majlis and Senate, which resulted in yet another majority vote of confidence. On 23 August (31 Mordad), Lord Stokes left Tehran for London and Harriman left for USA on 24 August (1 Shahrivar) expressing his regret that negotiations had been unfruitful. The worst outcome was the NIOC's gradual expulsion of foreign workers after announcing they would no longer pay salaries. At the time, Abadan had 350 British workers whose departure had been delayed at the request of the British government (EP1531/666).

Negotiations offered no solution for either government (Correspondence Ministry for Foreign affairs). Iran's government insisted that the talks adhere to the Nine-Point Law of nationalisation but the British rejected it. The result was no benefits for anyone. On 5 September 1951 (13 Shahrivar 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq announced to the Senate that he would propose to the British council yet another

round of negotiations or offer a counter proposal or suggestions and further asserted that should he not receive a satisfactory British response within two weeks, the residence permits for British experts would be cancelled. The date proposed for restarting negotiations was 17 September 1951 (25 Shahrivar 1330). However, a rejection letter from the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sir Francis Shepherd, was sent on 22 September 1951 (30 Shahrivar 1330). Although Dr. Mosaddeq had received yet another vote of confidence from the Senate, the British were no longer willing to negotiate with him because they believed it was impossible to resolve the conflict with Mosaddeq's government.

Despite British objections to the expulsion of their experts, which damaged their reputation in the Middle East, eventually they all left for Basra on 3 October 1951 (10 Mehr 1330). The British denied any intervention in Iran's internal affairs and called the expulsions a violation of Iran's agreement of 4 March 1857. They also claimed that Iran's dissolution of British consulates was another breach of the same agreement and a violation of international regulations and law between both governments. Hence, Britain formally objected and passed the responsibility for all due consequences to the Iranian government [The Answer no. 5; ج 10401/33, 25 Dey 1330].

When Harriman played mediator, Britain was not yet ready to share Iran's oil with USA and remained proud of their influence on Iran's ruling council. They hoped to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq's government and make a 50–50 contract with his successor. After Harriman failed, Dr. Mosaddeq realised that USA and Britain might not have reached a mutual agreement regarding the oil crisis, yet he fully expected the Americans to exert more pressure on AIOC. Hence, he ordered the expulsion of British workers. In response, the Secretary of State condemned his action and stated his concern that 'regretfully' Iran's nationalisation threatened to close the great refinery in Abadan. He believed this would cause grave instability and economic problems that would negatively affect Iran as a whole. The American government even accused Iran of hasty decisions and actions based on insufficient knowledge and without due consideration of lasting side effects (Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 1979: 170).

The inherent results did harm Iran, and people close to the Durbar, who were dependent on Britain, became even more blatant in their attacks on Dr. Mosaddeq, to the point of overthrowing his government. Differences between members of the National Front increased and the group that favoured Britain distanced itself from Dr. Mosaddeq. Some Majlis deputies under Jamāl Imāmī and others in the Senate under Ibrāhīm Khājiḥ'nūrī began openly opposing Dr. Mosaddeq's government and refused to attend Majlis sessions. They believed Dr. Mosaddeq's policies had placed the country in danger of Western anger (Muvahḥid 2006: 251–252).

Meanwhile, a third series of negotiations had been convened through the UN Security Council on 14–19 October (21–26 of Mehr) and a special session on oil was held on 15–19 October (22–26 Mehr). Nevertheless, the efforts of George McGhee, American Assistant Secretary of State, also failed to attain any desirable result.

The British clearly sought a solution that would stabilise their political influence in the Middle East. At the same time, they considered it impossible to settle the conflict with Iran as long as Dr. Mosaddeq was in power. Their agents actually noised it about that his successor would be a moderate. Dr. Mosaddeq's failure to come to an agreement with Britain was sufficient pretext to smoothen the path for his opponents. Thus, not only financial benefits but geopolitical hegemony in the Middle East were major factors responsible for what followed. Briefly, after fruitless negotiations, Dr. Mosaddeq's government began an oil-less economic programme. According to Homa Katouzian, "And such a solution would have been possible earlier if Iranians had been prepared to settle for less than what they regarded as absolutely fair" (Katouzian 2004: 8). However, Dr. Mosaddeq refused to grant privileges to foreign governments because his party's goal was to obtain Iran's absolute economic and political independence.

2.1.1 Collapse of Discussions with the World Bank

Dr. Mosaddeq also approached different agencies for a solution, including the World Bank. During his stay in USA, he agreed to accept a World Bank council to help manage Iran's oil installations. The World Bank offered to mediate both production and export of Iran's oil for two years: "This would have considerably reduced the scale of confrontation between Britain and Iran and might well have led to a permanent settlement of the dispute" (Katouzian 2004: 7). Although Dr. Mosaddeq initially accepted the proposal, he later rejected it because the World Bank proposed a joint operation of Iran's oil resources with the government's oil company and the return of British experts to Abadan (Muşaddiq 2007: 285). Dr. Mosaddeq considered the offer a ploy to subsume Iranian freedom and undermine its regional hegemony. The proposal ostensibly emphasised that the World Bank would begin its activities on behalf of the Iranian government. Such an agreement would have diluted accusations that Dr. Mosaddeq's government made agreements with foreign powers.

However, discussions with the World Bank's council failed to reach any positive conclusion, with initial and most direct effects soon observed during elections. The opposition was impatiently awaiting the flow of oil money but soon realised the pipeline was shut, which only made their disagreements with Dr. Mosaddeq more urgent and compelling. Furthermore, this disgruntled group was willing to make an agreement with Britain, and their agents actually announced a new strategy, putting more pressure on Dr. Mosaddeq to accept the British proposal. For instance, the newspaper *Shāhid* (forum of the *Baqā'ī-Makkī* clique), announced "selling some amount of oil with a fair price would greatly assist the party."⁵ They insisted on selling some oil to the international bank and believed that Iran's oil industry should

⁵*Shāhid News*, 1 March 1952 (10 Esfand 1330).

be nationalised more gradually and systematically. However, the most significant effect of rejecting the World Bank's proposal was the revelation of the American strategy directed against Iran. The secretary of state formally wrote:

The government of Iran has, several times, requested, in both written and verbal ways, loans and direct financial assistance from the U.S. to solve problems originating from the cut off of oil income. However, the government of the U.S. would not be able to continue supporting Iran and legitimize its assistance while Iran is able to gain considerable and decent income from its own oil (Ruhānī 1974: 257).

The statement was a clear violation of commitments and formal positions that President Truman had previously declared to Dr. Mosaddeq. Even Henry Francis Grady, the American ambassador in Iran, believed that the British should have shown greater flexibility by offering privileges without negative financial ramifications. Nevertheless, Britain showed only greater tenacity (EP1534/45; EP1534/45C).

2.2 Violence and Military Threat

In an interview with American and British journalists (13 June 1951; 22 Khordad 1330), the British Ambassador, Sir Francis Shepherd, asserted that in the event of any accident befalling British nationals, the Iranian government would be held responsible for their property and life. He added that to prevent any such disaster, the British government had taken the precaution of anchoring their three cruisers and a destroyer in the Persian Gulf. To complicate matters, Herbert Morrison⁶ vehemently disagreed with any grant of independence to Iran, currently under British 'Colonial Rule'.

After the nationalisation of the AIOC on 2 May 1951, Morrison took the lead in urging British retaliation by launching an expeditionary force to seize the island of Abadan. In an operation planned under the code name 'Buccaneer', the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, and the army assembled a virtual armada for attack (Louis 2004: 133).

Obviously, the British government had no desire for a war with Iran. The carrier deployment in the Persian Gulf was a mission of intimidation, especially after the Americans had warned them off. Nevertheless, the British knew that Dr. Mosaddeq's major aim was to gain the autonomy offered by economic recovery and fiscal independence. Therefore, Britain decided to wage an economic war against Iran by preventing oil exports pending the settlement of claims against the AIOC.

⁶Herbert Stanley Morrison—Baron Morrison of Lambeth, CH, PC, a British Labour politician—held senior positions in the Cabinet including Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Deputy PM.

The Russian-Persian Treaty of Friendship (26 February 1921)⁷ was a major obstacle for the use of external force against the Iranian government. According to its fifth article, the treaty charged both governments with a duty to bring to bear all facilities to prevent the armed forces of a third country from even threatening the interest or security of either party. The sixth article included third countries whose armed intervention usurped policy enforcement on Iranian soil which the Soviet Union considered an imminent danger. If Iran could not deal with the threat, the agreement gave the Soviet Union the right to move their troops into Iranian territory. This treaty restrained British pugnacity and gave them pause, especially since such a war's outcome held two possibilities: either Dr. Mosaddeq's government would fall or the Soviet Union's communist government would take control of Iran. Although it is unlikely that the British were trying to prevent WWII, a third scenario was more probable: the Soviet Union would have captured northern Iran while Britain took the south, bringing greater danger to the Middle East. Meanwhile, USA presumably never agreed to such a war because of the possibility of Iran's division, which USA did not want.

Concurrently, a bill presented to the Majlis on 21 June 1951 (30 Khordad 1330) mentioned that if anyone acted in bad faith towards the oil company by damaging oil pipes or stopping the oil refinery, they would be taken to military court and sentenced to death. In response, on 26 June 1951 (4 Tir 1330), Britain's foreign minister announced to the House of Commons that the company's employees were under intolerable conditions even though the bill had not yet passed. He mentioned that Mr. Drake (AIOC Chief, 1951), had received a letter from the temporary 'board of council' indicating that his preventing any signing of receipts from oil cargo ships had disabled oil exports, which Dr. Mosaddeq's government considered an act of sabotage. To protect Mr. Drake's life, he was advised to leave Iran for Basra and direct the company's Iranian and Iraqi assets from there. A warship out of Mauritius was ordered to the Abadan region as part of Operation MIDGET to protect British personnel (EP1531/679): "which is the only military operation envisaged for the protection of British personnel" (FO and WD, from FO to Tehran, 22 June 1951). This was a precaution taken in case the Iranian government neglected its responsibility to protect the life, property and wealth of British people, in which case the British government would act accordingly (EP1531/666; EP1531/671).

It was, however, obvious that the Iranian government would not abandon its responsibility in this regard. Dr. Mosaddeq had always emphasised patience and a calm approach. Rumours of his violating the 'life and wealth' of British workers seemed to have been spread only to create a pretext for British intervention, perhaps even to help motivate Iran to accept their proposals or alert their agents. The weakening of Dr. Mosaddeq's government was a British priority and they were

⁷Such treaties and agreements between Russia and Iran appear to be perennial no matter who is in charge of either government. See: "Russia signs military cooperation deal with Iran", in: *The Times of India*; at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/Russia-signs-military-cooperation-deal-with-Iran/articleshow/45954724.cms> (21 January 2015).

determined to find any possible way to do it. Although Dr. Mosaddeq was willing to keep foreign experts in Iran until the number of Iranian technical experts sufficed, the British were considering recalling their experts as one possible strategy to weaken Dr. Mosaddeq's government economically and politically.

Despite British objections to the compulsory expulsion of their experts from Abadan, Britain was far more concerned about its 'loss of face' in the Middle East, which would surely weaken their geo-political position. This statement is based on a telegram PM Clement Attlee sent to the American president where he specifically noted that the expulsion would damage the reputation and prestige of Britain in the Middle East. Attlee requested American assistance and implied a possible military option as a backup solution to prevent compulsory expulsion. USA did not agree with war and frankly told him that if Britain started such a war, the Americans would not support them (Hansard-UK Parliament, *Anglo-Iranian Oil Fields*, HL Deb, 21 March 1951). On 27 September (4 Mehr), the oil refinery of Abadan was occupied by Iranian soldiers. Finally, on 1 October (8 Mehr), the Foreign Ministry of Britain announced that British experts would leave and on 3 October 1951 (10 Mehr 1330), the last of them left Iran for Basra.

2.3 Sending Spies to Iran

From the nineteenth century, British policy towards Iran and the Middle East chiefly involved sending over diplomatic agents. The oil crisis with Iran was not different. Britain sent top agents, Robin Zaehner and Christopher Montague Woodhouse (senior SIS), as head of British Intelligence (MI6) in Tehran in 1951, to prepare the field for major assessments. Ann K. S. (Nancy) Lambton was their top Persian policy advisor on Iranian affairs and personally served to prevent any closeness or *entente* between Dr. Mosaddeq and the British government. She was, therefore, a major obstacle who believed the British must isolate him and refuse further negotiations with him (EP1531/674, 15 June 1951). Ms Lambton was also the first to propose his overthrow.

Britain desired a pro-British government in Iran and the only way to achieve this was by covert espionage. Robin Zaehner was entrusted the mission of encouraging opposition to Dr. Mosaddeq to set the stage for his downfall. Zaehner taught Persian Literature and Language at Oxford and had worked during war as an officer in the British Information Service. He had formidable experience in secrecy and masterminded a plot that involved several capable Iranian acquaintances. He took orders directly from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Herbert Morrison. After his arrival in Iran, he sought the help of 'Abbās Iskandarī to contact Qavām, whom he nominated PM designate.

After some weeks, Woodhouse joined him. Woodhouse, Zaehner and a group from the British embassy were under strict orders from Herbert Morrison to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq, an action later approved by Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, and Britain's Conservative government. He apparently "acted

with a much greater degree of independence than Morrison had been allowed” (Louis 2004: 162). Zaehner recognised the Rashīdiyān family as allies and built an impenetrable intelligence network via the Rashīdiyān brothers, Asad al-lāh, Qudrat al-lāh and Sif al-lāh. These British spies succeeded in increasing the opposition’s membership either by bribery or by the communist threat. During the early 1950s, the SIS paid them USD 10,000 monthly. It was British policy to spend money lavishly among Iranians involved in politics to interfere with Iran’s internal political affairs and achieve their goals. The Rashīdiyān family had been active on Britain’s behalf long before the government of Dr. Mosaddeq:

They were closely associated with Sayyid Z̤iyā and had helped him to create his National Will Party. During the mid-1940s, along with Sayyid Z̤iyā, they had co-operated with Zaehner in covert anti-communist activities (Azimi 1989: 280).

As British agents, the Rashīdiyān bribed Iranians from different groups and classes: “the armed forces, the Majlis (Iranian Parliament), religious leaders, the press, street gangs, politicians and other influential figures” (Kinzer 2008: 151). They spent the money they were paid for this purpose. Thus, the British covertly assisted anti-Mosaddeq efforts financially and, along with the Americans, purchased influence in the army as well.

These facts suggest that arrangements for the *coup* had been made by spies prior to Britain’s change of government from Labour to Conservative. The British also sent George Binney and William Gout as spies. They briefed each other on Iranian events and Binney convinced the British government not to send British officials to continue negotiations (EP1534/44, 29 July 1952), as otherwise, any action taken by the British would have damaged relations between Britain and the Shah—although some British officials believed Binney’s proposal would fail (EP1534/17E). Binney acted on behalf of the British government (EP1532/50E; EP1534/9), especially on the oil issue. He contacted Gout to initiate the latter’s mission (correspondence between Binney and Gout, nd). For instance, Gout sent several reports on meetings with Iranian officials at all levels (Report from Gout, Tehran, 14 January 1952), including copies of newspaper reports and suggestions for further actions. The main purpose of these activities seemed to be to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq.

The British thought to wrest power from Dr. Mosaddeq. They proposed a joint venture to the Americans and even chose various prime ministerial candidates such as Kashani, a member of the National Front. According to American and British evaluations (November 1951; Aban 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq and the National Front were corrupt and lacked the people’s confidence. Both powers debated Iran’s nationalist sentiments and agreed that Dr. Mosaddeq was an astute politician who used sentiment to favour National Front objectives.

The British resolved to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq although the Americans rejected the proposal. British conspirators believed that Kashani would betray and leave Dr. Mosaddeq, if he was made a better offer by any of Mosaddeq’s foes. Hence, after failed oil negotiations, they focused on Kashani and initiated plans for an alternative solution.

2.4 Legal Action

During the eight months after Iran nationalised its oil industry, British negotiation efforts proved futile. They finally filed a complaint with the ICJ hoping to compel the Iranian government with a legal ultimatum that would end Dr. Mosaddeq's intransigence and return him to the negotiation table. On 28 May 1951 (6 Khordad 1330), the British embassy informed Iran's foreign minister that it had referred their dispute to the ICJ after Iran had rejected AIOC demands. On 22 June 1951 (31 Khordad 1330), Britain petitioned the ICJ and pursued its complaint (Muvahhid 2006:215). On 29 June 1951 (7 Tir 1330), the Iranian government informed the Chief Justice of the ICJ that they rejected demands made by the British government for reasons of national security. They also claimed that the British government, per se, was not a competent entity in the conflict between the Iranian government and the AIOC. Thus, because the claimant lacked judiciary authority, the execution of rights of authority could not be referred to the court. For these reasons, the Iranian government requested the court to dismiss the entire matter.

Britain attained a judgment from the ICJ to stop Iran but Iran ignored the judgment and claimed that its 1933 agreement with the AIOC was made in the private sector; hence, only Iranian courts had the authority to resolve the case. On 5 July 1951 (13 Tir 1330), the ICJ announced by majority vote that the British request was outside its jurisdiction (ST/LEG/SER.F/1 1992). The British ambassador in Tehran immediately announced that Britain would launch an appeal (Muvahhid 2007: 140–142). The Iranian government insisted that the ICJ was not a competent forum for the case and refused to acknowledge its authority. On 9 July (17 Tir), the Iranian government informed the UN secretary general that the ICJ's unjust actions had lost them Iran's trust and that the Iranian government would, from that date, reiterate its position of 2 October 1930 and not accept any ICJ judgment. "By nine votes against five, the Court declared that it lacked jurisdiction" and the ICJ eventually accepted the Iranian claim in July 1952 (Summary of the Judgment of 22 July 1952).

Britain then took the case to the UN Security Council but did not gain its support. On 28 September (5 Mehr), the British government wrote to the Security Council (Hansard-UK Parliament, *Anglo-Iranian Oil Fields*, HL Deb 21 March 1951) stating that the Iranian government had not followed security directives for AIOC as recommended by the ICJ. They accordingly requested registration of the matter with the council and further proposed that it should meet on 1 October (8 Mehr) as the compulsory expulsion of British experts was imminent (4 October; 11 Mehr). However, the British referral to the Security Council failed (Muvahhid 2007: 219–220). Its failed legal actions against Iran placed Britain in a difficult situation, another reason for their consultations with USA.

2.5 British Propaganda and Consultation with the Americans

After Iran nationalised its oil industry, the British began negotiations with the Americans while simultaneously launching propaganda to attract American attention (Letter from Keith H Williams, 25 July 1952). Being a close neighbour of communist Russia coupled with the presence of Iran's Tudeh Party (a pro-labour/pro-Soviet group) were perfect grounds for the British who maintained that the 'Red Menace' leviathan would become a 'first world' power if USA did not seriously oppose the beast.

In this manner, the British reached out to USA for a solution. On 11 May 1951 (20 Ordibehesht 1330), the British ambassador met with Freeman Matheus and George McGhee in Washington to solve Iran's oil issue. The American state department believed it impossible to take a stand against nationalisation although it was possible to oppose Iran's unilateral abolition of the 1933 contract. The Americans advised that all endangered British nationals should leave Iran without the use of force because of the Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship to avoid the possibility of Soviet intervention and the possible takeover of Iran.

The American state department announced it would not oppose Iran's oil nationalisation because any such disagreement would cause problems for USA and other Western countries in Iran and possibly move Iran closer to the Soviet Union. The Americans may not have opposed nationalisation (Muvahhid 2005: 26–28) but they most certainly did not like it. According to a telegram (17 March 1951; 26 Esfand 1329) from Dean Acheson (American Secretary of State) to Henry Francis Grady (American ambassador in Tehran), although Americans did not like nationalising resources, they acknowledged it as the right of any government on the condition that fair compensation was immediately paid. USA did not agree, however, with the promotion of an industrial nationalisation policy in the world.

At the same time, the Americans vigorously opposed the use of force or threat of war in Iran. On 18 May 1951 (27 Ordibehesht 1330), the American state department published a statement indicating that Britain had successfully gained American support in its effort against Iran (Letter from Keith H. Williams, 5 September 1952). On 19 May 1951 (28 Ordibehesht 1330), the American government published a statement in Washington DC asserting its deep concern over the matter between the British and Iranian governments. USA advised friendly negotiations and accordingly announced its neutral role in the conflict (EP1531/672, 20 June 1951). At the same time, USA announced that it would not exploit Iranian oil resources, which was a huge disappointment for Dr. Mosaddeq. It became clear that USA was, in fact, opposing the Iranian government; otherwise, they would have cooperated with the extraction of Iran's oil resources. The Americans also opposed any unilateral action against the AIOC by the Iranian government and American oil companies informed the American government of their disinclination to exploit Iran's oil.

USA postponed acceptance of the proposed British terms to accept the principle of nationalisation but did not accept sharing more than 50 % of oil revenues with Iran after full compensation to AIOC. These developments seemed to suggest that from a legal perspective, Iran had the right to nationalise its oil but from political and economic perspectives, Iran must be prevented from the attainment of independence (sovereignty). On 27 June 1951 (5 Tir 1330), Dean Acheson published a statement expressing regret over Iran's rejection of the latest British proposal (EP1534/39, 22 July 1952) although the British had accepted the principle of nationalisation (EP1531/668, 19 June 1951). According to Acheson, this proposal could have laid the foundation for further negotiations (Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 1979: 170).

Dr. Mosaddeq was, however, unaware of any talks between the two powers and insisted on enforcing the industry's nationalisation. In response to Acheson's statement on 27 June 1951 (5 Tir 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq reconsidered the matter of compensation and of oil sales and the assurance of full security for British nationals in Iran. Perhaps Dr. Mosaddeq should have considered American and British disagreements as neither basic nor ideological as both countries valued their interests when such investments were threatened. Americans actually preferred a more adaptable politician to Dr. Mosaddeq as a solution to end the oil dispute as his inflexible character gradually distanced him from USA, which then grew closer to Britain.

Meanwhile, USA invited input from 19 oil companies to resolve the matter of compensation via an international cartel consensus. A board called the 'British Procurement Group' (BPG) was formed in London to examine AIOC's oil customers, including American ones. Finally, an exchange of views between BPG and American companies led to the establishment of a balance between supply and demand in late 1951. The balance of oil held by international cartels directly led to economic recession in Iran, weakening the position of Dr. Mosaddeq's government. Later, in July, the British re-opened oil negotiations with Iran via American mediation under William L. Taub, but only as a ploy to execute the overthrow of Dr. Mosaddeq (EP1534/42; Letter from R. W. Bailey to Mr. Taub, July 1952).

Meanwhile, Churchill visited USA and Iranians naturally felt threatened: "If Americans reach an agreement with the Colonization ideas of Churchill, the East will be in fire and blood."⁸ However, such threats did not frighten the Americans. On the other hand, the British had already concluded that the only way to solve the oil crisis was to share Iran's oil with the Americans. A final agreement on sharing oil profits seemed to have been reached between Eden and Harriman in Abadan in 1951 (1330). Initially, the British seemed unwilling as Harriman had already come to Tehran on 15 July 1951 (23 Tir 1330) without any offer of British largesse. By autumn 1951, matters had changed and Eden together with Churchill, for the first time proposed dividing Iran's oil with Americans when Dr. Mosaddeq was, in fact, actually in USA. If the British had made the offer earlier that summer, a more

⁸*Bākhtar-i Imrūz News*, 31 December 1951 (9 Dey 1330).

satisfactory outcome might have been achieved. However, the British were waiting for a 'sudden change', considering their covert machinations in Iran and the objections voiced by various opposition groups under British influence. They had already chosen a new prime ministerial candidate and were simply waiting for the right opportunity to act. Ensuing incidents demonstrate that although Britain had promised to share Iran's oil with the Americans, they had still hoped to oust Dr. Mosaddeq's government and employ their own well-remunerated people.

The Americans, on the other hand, never desired the expansion of Iran's oil resources because this would endanger all international American investments. Iran's income could not exceed that of Saudi Arabia. In fact, oil company leaders, the American secretary of state and the American president all agreed with the proposed 50–50 plan. USA's concern was that if Iran successfully attained fiscal autonomy and political independence, Venezuela and other countries, on which USA depended for oil, would follow suit.

2.6 The Oil Boycott

International sanctions were a consequence of Iranian oil nationalisation and they brought grievous economic loss and political turmoil to Iran. After the AIOC removed its workers, these sanctions only intensified. As the British government was dissatisfied with the situation, it attempted different measures to regain and maintain its considerable interests in and profits from Iran's black gold. In July 1951, AIOC oil exports completely ceased, immediately affecting all attendant industries, commerce and businesses, causing considerable damage to the Iranian economy. Meanwhile, the Western powers designed a detailed scheme that solved the needs of global customers who had previously relied on Iranian oil. Iran's oil industry was thus boycotted, something Dr. Mosaddeq had never anticipated. This had ramifications for the nation's internal affairs and economy that could not have been imagined except by her adversaries.

Fātiḥ wrote that on 16 June 1951 (25 Khordad 1330), Dr. Mosaddeq summoned him and stated that he wanted the ONL executed on time and with a peaceful settlement with the oil company. Fātiḥ discussed the matter in some detail and asked Dr. Mosaddeq "what if no agreement with AIOC was reached and the level of disagreement remained insurmountable, how would the PM sell the oil?" Dr. Mosaddeq answered that "the world need for oil was so significant that if no agreement was achieved with AIOC, others would easily purchase the oil and that he was at all worried in this regard" (Fātiḥ 2005: 529). However, Dr. Mosaddeq was quite mistaken and the main purpose of the boycott seemed to have been to force his hand to settle with the AIOC.

Dr. Mosaddeq's main desire was to acquire a completely independent status for Iran within the international community. He had dashed British hopes several times during negotiations and consequently, the world powers allied against him in the belief that a continued economic boycott would cause the fall of his government.

However, the refusal to aid Mosaddeq's government did not result in Iran's economic ruin:

According to Middleton's reports, the economy was sagging but not collapsing. If Mosaddeq did not respond soon to economic pressure, there would be the danger that he might be replaced by something worse, either a communist regime or the fundamentalist religious faction led by Kashani, whom Middleton described as a sly, corrupt and anti-western demagogue (Louis 2004: 149).

Such rumours of economic collapse and the establishment of communism in Iran caused the Americans serious worry over the entire Middle East. The British objective thus was very successful in that it seeded the notion, cultivated it and then nourished it to fruition. Nevertheless, and despite the many pressures, Dr. Mosaddeq's policies managed to keep both the economy and the country under control and in balance. However, the war he began years ago for an independent oil-based economy continued. Although even he admitted that an underground market would be best for Iran's oil, he would not surrender and continued trying to find legitimate customers for Iran's oil. Selling oil to countries that lacked oil tankers presented problems. Iran could sell to Japan and Italy, of course, but not in considerable quantities. As a result, Iran's total oil sales during the boycott roughly equalled merely one-day's production under the AIOC.

Among Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia and Poland were former AIOC customers and offered to purchase oil from NIOC. However, Dr. Mosaddeq was silent⁹ and made no firm decision on their offers.¹⁰ Due to internal and external pressures, Dr. Mosaddeq was not interested in selling oil to the Soviets or to other communist countries. For example, Tiymürtāsh, a Majlis attorney, accused Dr. Mosaddeq of moving closer to the communists from the very beginning. He believed Mosaddeq must not sell to the Soviet Union and that Iran should continue its natural course, which, he assumed, was to continue selling oil to Britain.¹¹

The Tudeh Party, however, proposed selling oil to the Soviet Union. Since USA supported the British boycott, the Tudehis concluded "the government must enter into serious negotiations with the Soviets for long term agreements on oil sales" (EP1015/107, 8 April 1953). The Tudeh Party attempted solidarity with the government by appealing for unity against imperialism (EP1015/110, 17 April 1953). However, the government was unwilling to shed Britain's yoke for the Soviet fist, especially when both powerful governments were locked in a cold war. The government's own newspaper wrote that selling oil to the Soviet Union would only enhance Soviet influence in Iran.¹²

⁹Ibid., 25 August 1951 (2 Shahrivar 1330).

¹⁰Ibid., 22 September 1951 (30 Shahrivar 1330).

¹¹Ibid., 8 December 1951 (16 Azar 1330).

¹²Ibid., 10 December 1951 (18 Azar 1330).

Consequently, the government put off selling oil to other communist countries as well—those that were not afraid of cutting ties with the British. These nations even offered to provide their own transport system if Iran agreed to sell. On 2 January 1952 (11 Dey 1330), Poland complained that Iran had paid insufficient attention to their proposal to purchase oil (Ruhānī 1974: 398). However, even the idea of selling oil to communist nations had adverse results. Purchase requests from the Soviets and other communist countries gave Americans the perfect pretext to initiate and spread rumours of serious oil contracts between Iran and these nations. What prevented Dr. Mosaddeq from selling oil to them was the constant pressure from opposition groups and powers, both within and outside Iran. On 18 January 1952 (27 Dey 1330), the central committee of the Tudeh Party wrote an open letter to Dr. Mosaddeq. It blamed the oil crisis on wrong policies, insufficient foreign trade and errant domestic and international government policies. It also mentioned that the Iranian government could sell oil to non-imperialist countries.¹³ All these interests and the British challenge to preserve its stake in Iran were related to the economy, particularly to oil, as political concerns played complementary roles.

2.7 Conclusion

The British would not surrender their assets, their efforts to maintain *status quo* were multilateral and multi-dimensional and they had determined that negotiations with Dr. Mosaddeq would not in the least favour their control. However, not one of several activities, including the diplomatic missions of Basil Jackson and Richard Stokes, could preserve the industry on their terms or stop Dr. Mosaddeq's political movement. He had acquired the support of the Iranian majority and even minority opposition cliques in the Majlis who temporarily stopped criticising his government at critical moments to prevent a weakening of his regime. These sentiments were based on ancient principles of Persian culture that put aside internal conflicts to preserve national interests and unity. Their support was a significant motivator for Mosaddeq's steadfast assault when confronted with British counter proposals.

Accordingly, the new British government aimed to overthrow Dr. Mosaddeq. In the next chapter, we discuss how British intervention made way for further measures to change Dr. Mosaddeq's government in concert with the British power transfer from Labour to Conservative with Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden as PM and Foreign Secretary, respectively. We begin by examining Eden's plan to attract attention and rebuild Iranian trust. The colossal step to renew this trust would not be an easy undertaking.

¹³*Bih Sū-yi Āyandah News*, 22 January 1952 (1 Bahman 1330).

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