



Mosaddeq being carried away by his supporters outside the parliament building after an address on oil nationalization, September 27, 1951. Copyright © 2003 AP/Wide World Photos.

MOHAMMAD MOSADDEQ

and the 1953 Coup in Iran

• • •

*Edited by Mark J. Gasiorowski
and Malcolm Byrne*



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 2004 by Syracuse University Press
Syracuse, New York 13244-5160
All Rights Reserved

First Edition 2004
04 05 06 07 08 09 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.[∞]TM

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 coup in Iran / edited by Mark J. Gasiorowski
and Malcolm Byrne. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (Modern intellectual and political history of the Middle East)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8156-3018-2 (cl. : alk. paper)

1. Iran—Politics and government, 1941–1979. 2. Mosaddeq, Mohammad, 1880–1967

I. Gasiorowski, Mark J., 1954– II. Byrne, Malcolm. III. Series.

DS316.6.M64 2004

955.053—dc22

2004001922

Manufactured in the United States of America

♦ ♦ ♦
We dedicate this book to all Iranians
who have struggled to make their country
independent and democratic.

The 1953 Coup in Iran and the Legacy of the Tudeh

Maziar Behrooz

Newly available CIA documentation on the role of the United States and Great Britain in toppling the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosaddeq presents a single, all-embracing motive for the coup.¹ CIA analyst Donald N. Wilber's *Overthrow of Premier Mosaddeq of Iran: November 1952-August 1953* suggests that fears that the Tudeh Party might push Iran into the Soviet camp—geopolitical anxieties conditioned by the cold war—were of prime concern to the perpetrators of the plot and the main justification for Operation TPAAX.² The new CIA documents argue that with the deterioration of Iran's economy under the nationalists, chaos and collapse were probable and would ultimately lead to the loss of Iran to the West. The oil issue is deemed to be of secondary importance in the new documents and is explained away by pointing to an oversupply of petroleum on the international market.

Other chapters in this volume discuss the political and economic state of Iran under Mosaddeq, the British and American programs to undermine his government, and the activities of various Iranian actors other than the Tudeh. This chapter evaluates the role and legacy of the Tudeh in the 1953 coup, examines the party's relationship with the National Front and Mosaddeq himself and the reasons behind its inaction during the crucial August 16–19 period, and attempts to explain why the party was so easily tossed aside during the coup.

Understanding the performance of the Tudeh has become even more important in light of the new evidence. According to the latest documents, the coup plot was successful only on the narrowest of margins. This suggests that a concerted reaction by either the nationalist government or the Tudeh (or both)

could have prevented its success. Hence, a realistic portrait of Tudeh strength, the state of its leadership, and the party's relationship with Mosaddeq are the focus of this chapter. What assessment can be made of the Tudeh's organizational strength? Here, the party's abilities should be viewed from two perspectives: first, whether the party was a threat to the nationalist government—*that is*, whether the party had a plan to take over political power; and second, whether the Tudeh was in a position to counter the coup even if it had no plan to assume state power and was not in a position to do so. Dividing the question into two parts offers the benefit of allowing an assessment of the Tudeh's abilities on two levels. This chapter argues that while the party had neither a plan nor the capability to secure state power for itself in 1953, it could have strengthened its position had it reacted differently to the coup. The Tudeh's posture toward Mosaddeq and the coup was significantly affected by factionalism and the incompetence of its leadership, which translated into inaction and ultimate the decimation of the party.

The Tudeh Organization and Its Strength

Established in 1941, the Tudeh had become a popular political organization by the late 1940s. By 1951, when the oil nationalization movement culminated in the appointment of Mosaddeq as premier, the Tudeh had already managed to survive elimination from the political scene. Following an unsuccessful attempt on the shah's life in early February 1949, the government declared the party illegal and forced it to go underground.

With many of its leaders arrested or in hiding around the country, and with little experience in underground activity, this crisis was the most serious challenge to the party since its establishment. But state repression at this point was not systematic, and, compared to the post-1953 period, was clearly less severe. The party's activities in the early 1950s became semilegal, and it soon managed to reestablish itself by creating a number of front organizations and publications designed to fill the vacuum left by its inability to function fully in the open.

By 1950, the party was publishing three daily papers, *Razmi*, *Mardom*, and *Basni-ye Ayandel*, and had organized its supporters under the banner of the Iranian Society for Peace (*Jam'i-yat-e Iran-i-ye Haindar-e Soltan*). Furthermore, in December 1950 the Tudeh's military network managed to arrange for the escape of key members of the party leadership who had been in jail since early 1949.

By 1951, the nationwide Tudeh organization seems to have adapted to its semilegal status and become almost fully functional under the new political at-

mosphere of the nationalist government. The government crackdown, nevertheless, had a number of drawbacks for the party. First, while the Tudeh managed to reorganize itself as a semilegal force, it was still limited when it came to participation in legitimate, open political activity. The party was unable to participate in parliamentary elections or maintain official political clubs or headquarters, and its members could be arrested simply by virtue of being associated with the organization.

Second, some experienced party leaders were forced to flee the country, which in effect split control of the party into two groups, those who stayed in Iran and those who left, with real power remaining in the hands of those who stayed. With the departure of some additional top functionaries in 1952 and the cumbersome nature of communication between the two groups, the leadership in Iran ultimately proved unprepared to guide the party during the defining days of 1951–53.

The third impediment was a psychological one, which may have had a directly negative influence on the party's performance during the coup some three years later and may help to explain the leadership's failure to move decisively against the plot. One observer has suggested that in 1953 the top levels of the Tudeh believed that the party could survive the crisis, much as it had in 1949.¹ Nureddin Kianuri, one of the Tudeh's main figures, points in his memoirs to the leadership's false sense of self-assurance and even arrogance as a result of its ability to recover from the earlier crisis.⁴

What assessment can be made of the Tudeh's strength during 1951–53? According to one source, a CIA memorandum dated October 1952 suggested that the party had about twenty thousand hard-core members with eight thousand based in Tehran.⁵ Other American intelligence reports during this period confirm this and add that the Tudeh had by then rebuilt its network, drawing its membership from among intellectuals and industrial workers.⁶ These intelligence reports also note some of the Tudeh's shortcomings, such as the fact that its appeal was limited to urban dwellers, whereas the overwhelming majority of Iran's population lived in rural areas where the party had no apparent base. None of the reports seem to suggest that the Tudeh was viewed as an imminent danger in terms of its ability to topple the Mosaddeq government. Indeed, one U.S. embassy specialist on the communists has suggested that the party was "well-organized but not very powerful" and that its significance was greater "in the minds of certain U.S. officials than in reality."⁷

As far as the Tudeh threat is concerned, there is a clear difference between Donald Wilber's *Overthrow* and its appendixes and other American appraisals.

While the sources of information used in the other appraisals seem to be the same, Wilber makes much of the communist threat and uses it as an important justification for the coup. Other U.S. intelligence reports generally view the Tudeh factor as much less threatening than Wilber does.

Another asset of the Tudeh was its network within the Iranian military. It should be noted that U.S. intelligence was only partially aware of this network at the time *Overthrow* was produced in March 1954.⁸ The Tudeh Party Military Organization of Iran, or TPMO (*Sazman-e Nezami-ye Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran*) was established in 1944. It is also sometimes referred to simply as the Officers Organization (*Sazman-e Afshan*).⁹

The TPMO has generally been considered to be the party's strongest card in the years preceding the coup. Estimates on the number of officers involved in the network vary. All the estimates on the number of personnel involved in the TPMO were provided by the shah's regime after 1954, as the party did not have clear estimates of its own at the time.¹⁰ The official Tudeh estimate of 466 members suggests that 429 people were arrested after the coup and that 37 managed to flee the country. On August 19, 1953, 243 officers were stationed in Tehran and only three or four were serving in the shah's Imperial Guard, the principal military unit counted on to execute the coup. Most of these personnel were in noncombat positions. A high-ranking officer in the TPMO has since given the number of pro-Tudeh officers as 491, which seems to be the most realistic figure.¹¹

Had the party chosen to take military action, the TPMO could have counted on some six thousand or more party and Tudeh Party Youth Organization members in Tehran alone.¹² These party estimates are close to U.S. intelligence assessments of the party's strength in the capital. In addition, during August 1953 an officer in charge of a battalion from Hamadan that was brought to Tehran to take part in the coup and another in charge of a company in Chalus were both Tudeh members and able to distribute weapons to the party.¹³

During 1952–53 the TPMO, through its intelligence network in the armed forces, helped to uncover plots against the nationalist government. The TPMO was well aware of the August coup plot and gave the party leaders a warning to this effect that was subsequently passed on to Mosaddeq (see below).

What appraisal can be made of the combined strength of the Tudeh's non-military and military components? Some American intelligence reports did not see an immediate danger in the party's posture, and at least one Tudeh leader's

assessment corresponds with this observation. Kimuri states that not only did the party have neither a plan nor the capacity to topple Mosaddeq, it was not even strong enough to defend the nationalist government against the coup.¹⁴ Clearly, there is no evidence that the party had a plan for securing political power for itself in the foreseeable future. It is difficult to imagine how the party could have ousted Mosaddeq with no plan, no real base in the countryside, and with approximately five hundred army officers and between six and eight thousand members and supporters in Tehran.¹⁵

Does this mean, however, that the party did not have a realistic chance of defending the nationalist government against the coup and saving itself? It is clear that most of the Tudeh officers were in noncombat posts and would have had limited ability to provide the party and Mosaddeq with rapid military counteraction. It is also clear, however, that these officers were in a position to access and distribute weapons.¹⁶ In their memoirs, TPMO high- and middle-ranking members have confirmed their ability to distribute weapons and even to assassinate key Iranian leaders of the coup.¹⁷ Hence, with a disciplined party membership, backed by military officers with access to weapons, the Tudeh had a strong hand. It might not have succeeded in defeating the coup, but there was a strong possibility that it could have. For these party resources to translate into meaningful action, however, a coherent and thoughtful leadership—united and with a vision of how to prepare the party and its assets—was required. As we shall see, this was the area where the party had major shortcomings.

The Tudeh and Mosaddeq

Wilbert's *Overtlow* makes much of Mosaddeq's relationship with the Tudeh. It argues that his tolerance of the party made it possible for the Tudeh to grow in strength and pose the danger that served as the partial pretext for the coup. On the other hand, any move by the party to counter the coup would have depended very much on the Tudeh's relationship with Mosaddeq. In the final analysis, it is difficult to imagine how the Tudeh could have moved against the coup without some sort of coordination with the National Front.

The Tudeh reaction to the oil nationalization movement, led by the National Front and Mosaddeq, was, at best, contradictory, in part because the party made its decisions with the interests of the Soviet Union in mind.¹⁸ A fundamental difference between the nationalists, headed by Mosaddeq, and the Tudeh was over their approach to the concept of national sovereignty. For the

Tudeh, its fraternal obligations to the Soviet Union, a concept it also referred to as international proletarian duty, were of prime significance in formulating its approach. From the party's perspective these commitments played an important role in the international battle between the capitalist and socialist blocs. In this context, if such obligations came into conflict with Iran's national interests, then the latter could be, and in many cases were, compromised.

The nationalists' approach was far removed from such a class-based and ideological approach. For Mosaddeq, national sovereignty of a country like Iran for so long under foreign domination and occupation, meant national control over its resources and politics. In this context, international development could be addressed only after national interests were secured. The issue of national sovereignty remained a major point of friction between the Tudeh and the nationalists for years.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, national sovereignty was increasingly connected to the oil issue. When nationalization of Iran's petroleum industry resurfaced in 1949, tensions between the Tudeh and the nationalists also resurfaced. When the oil nationalization bill was passed in 1951 and Mosaddeq became prime minister, the communists once more proved unprepared for the challenge.

The Tudeh entered this new round of crisis by miscalculating the internal balance of power in Iran, misunderstanding the new wave of nationalism and patriotism unleashed by the oil nationalization act, and, once more, maintaining its close links to Soviet interests.

At this point the cold war was well underway, and the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a competition on a worldwide scale. The victory of the Chinese Revolution in October 1949 and the start of the Korean War in June 1950 only added fuel and intensity to the superpower struggle for control and hegemony. But the situation in Iran was very different from the rest of the world. Here, by taking on the British Empire, the oil nationalization act had become a manifestation of the nation's struggle for its national sovereignty. The emergence of mass support in urban areas that followed nationalization further pointed to the popularity of the actions led by Mosaddeq.

Oil nationalization put the Mosaddeq cabinet on a collision course with the British Empire but not necessarily with U.S. interests, or at least not right away. Initially, the Americans, under a Democratic administration, had their differences with the British, both on the way the petroleum crisis was being handled and on the issue of greater profit sharing for the U.S. oil companies. One observer of Iran-U.S. relations described the American approach, under

the Democrats, in the following terms: "The Truman administration's policy as developed by Secretary of State Acheson was to attempt to placate the British while trying to convince Mosaddeq to agree on a compromise."¹⁹ Mosaddeq was well aware of these differences and tried to exploit them to Iran's benefit. The presence of such figures as Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi (the future coup leader and Mosaddeq's successor) and Ali Amini in Mosaddeq's first cabinet and the support of such figures as Moza'far Baqa'i attest to this fact. These were the people who supported Mosaddeq while he was on good terms with the Americans but began to desert him when he fell out of favor.

The Tudeh Party based its analysis of the nationalization movement not on internal Iranian realities but on the international situation, again keeping Soviet interests primarily in mind. Hence, while the National Front was engaging the British and its domestic Iranian supporters, the Tudeh viewed the situation in terms of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. For example, after the start of hostilities on the Korean peninsula, the main Tudeh front organization, the Iranian Society for Peace, directed its propaganda against the United States. The society's tactics exposed the Tudeh leadership's lack of comprehension of Iran's internal realities.

From the very beginning of the oil nationalization movement, the Tudeh denounced it as an imperialist act and suggested that the only proper expression could be nationalization of southern oil. In analyzing the Sixteenth Majles, where the National Front had a minority presence yet eventually managed to pass the nationalization bill, the Tudeh divided the members into three categories: first, the opportunists, who had no stand of their own and would change their vote in accordance with the position of the most powerful alignment of the moment; second, those who depended on foreigners and carried out their wishes; and third, the deceivers who had all the characteristics of the first two categories but pretended to care for the people, whom they never really understood.²⁰ Of course, this third group was the National Front.

In June 1950 the daily *Mardom* described the oil nationalization attempt in the following terms: "Already we can be sure that revisions in the southern oil contract will not be in favor of our people and will only result in the consolidation of England's position in our country. The only time our people may realize their rights in the southern oil resources is when they can determine their destiny. Hence, the solution of the oil question is related to the victory of our party, that is, the people of Iran."²¹

When the Majles subcommittee on oil rejected the Gas-Golsha'iyan bill, the Tudeh attributed it not to the efforts of the National Front but to the peo-

ple of Iran: "[The bill] was rejected by the people of Iran and not by the graced National Front."²² Even Mosaddeq's rejection of the American offer a compromise, put forward by Averell Harriman in July 1951, failed to convince the party of the genuinely patriotic nature of the movement. Tudeh's position from the start of the second round of the oil debate in Iran the summer of 1950 to mid-1952 was one of antagonism toward the author of the movement, namely Mosaddeq and the National Front.

While the party formulated its policy on the oil nationalization question with Soviet interests in mind, this did not mean that Moscow's policy on matter was the same as the Tudeh's. The Soviets, while not doing much to help Iran at a time when it was under a British embargo, did recognize the importance of the nationalization act. The Soviet media supported nationalization and gave positive coverage to Mosaddeq and the National Front.²³ This meant that at this point the Tudeh was acting on its own perception of what its international duties (i.e., Soviet interests) were.

The party's antagonism toward the Mosaddeq cabinet continued into a second year of his term in office. The party leadership's reaction to the June 1952 events was confused and ineffectual. It was unfazed by Mosaddeq's resignation on July 16. The party press continued to attack him and to refer to a dispute with the shah as merely one between different factions of a reactionary ruling elite.²⁴ But the popular explosion inevitably involved many rank-and-file party members and supporters who could see firsthand Mosaddeq's popularity and became persuaded of the justness of his cause. These members began to join in the demonstrations and put pressure on the party leadership to reconsider its position. Reluctantly, the party finally joined the drive for Mosaddeq's reinstatement on July 21.²⁵ For obvious reasons, the Tudeh lost initiative in this round of the confrontation. While some experienced party members managed to lead some local demonstrations, the Tudeh in effect joined spontaneously, without preparation. The TPMQ, which had many officers among the military units assigned to suppress the revolt, also likely remained inactive.²⁶

The July 21 events put the Tudeh leadership in a rather odd situation. Up to this date the party had been attacking the nationalist movement and Mosaddeq as reactionaries and deceivers. Now the turn of events and political realities had put the party in the position of joining in to defend the very movement it had mocked. From this point on, the Tudeh's policy began gradually to back Mosaddeq at the expense of maintaining the party's independence. This gradual change in party policy was linked to a changing factional balance within the

party leadership and was qualified at the beginning. Following the July 1952 events, the party accepted the slogan of oil nationalization in place of its own calls for nationalization of the southern oil fields only. This was a major policy adjustment, and was a clear admission of error in connection with the Tudeh's policy toward the nationalists. Furthermore, the party began to tone down its attacks on Mosaddeq, although they did not stop altogether.²⁷

The Tudeh's relationship with the nationalist government during the second year of Mosaddeq's tenure should be understood in light of the fluidity of the period. CIA documents show that American officials feared Mosaddeq would have to rely increasingly on the Tudeh to mobilize the crowds on his behalf. Their fear was further strengthened by Mosaddeq's refusal to suppress the Tudeh, even though the party had already been declared illegal in 1949. Much of this perception seems to have been based on the perception of National Front-Tudeh cooperation during the July 1952 events. But, as noted above, the party's participation in those events was spontaneous and came at a time when the party leadership was disoriented and out of touch with realities on the street.

The Tudeh's relationship with the National Front between July 1952 and August 1953, even as the party was readjusting its policy, was far from harmonious. Because of intense internal factional struggles, the party was losing its cohesion and often adopted contradictory policies toward Mosaddeq. It is clear that the type of coordinated cooperation and mutual reliance the Americans feared existed between Mosaddeq and the Tudeh could not have existed. On the other hand, the type of confidence building necessary to establish a more cooperative and harmonious relationship between the party and Mosaddeq also did not materialize.

Tudeh Factionalism

To understand the party's behavior toward Mosaddeq and its lack of a meaningful reaction to the coup, it is necessary to understand its internal dynamics and factionalism at the highest levels.²⁸

Different labels could be used to identify the two factions. Sources published by the coup leaders called them, rather inadequately, the old guard and corrupted faction versus the critical and compromising faction.²⁹ Better designations would perhaps be moderate versus hard-liner. Both factions shared an admiration for the Soviet Union and adhered to Moscow's interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. But they also had major theoretical and other differences.

The oil nationalization movement brought the two factions deeper in conflict.

The hard-line faction's principal members were young activists such as Nureddin Kianuri, Ehsanallah Tabari, Amanallah Qornishi, Ahmad Qaseri, Maryam Frouz, and Gholam Hossein Forutan, as well as older members such as Ardashir (Ardashes) Avanisian and Abdul Samad Kambakhsh. This group presented a more dogmatic perception of Marxism and was more insistent on the leadership of the working class and on adherence to party rules, and was generally opposed to the nationalist government of Mosaddeq. The policy confronting the Mosaddeq cabinet, which lasted until July 1952, was largely a result of this faction gaining the upper hand. The hard-liners considered Mosaddeq and the National Front as part of the Iranian bourgeoisie who enjoyed close ties with the Americans. The oil nationalization movement was explained away as a conflict between the bourgeoisie and the imperial court and the landowning class, which maintained close ties with the British. Because of this two-sided understanding of international and domestic alliances, the hard-liners viewed the dispute between the National Front and the British as being in reality one between British and U.S. policy in Iran.

The differences between the two factions were clearest when it came to the party's proposal for a united popular front against imperialism and domestic reactionary forces. The united front policy was a replica of the Soviet-led approach to the Third Communist International (Comintern) in the 1920s and 1930s. Its essence was to form a coalition between the communists and noncommunist progressive political parties in order to establish a strong opposition force against those deemed to be reactionaries. On the international level, results of the policy had been mixed by the time of the 1951-53 events in Iran.

The key question was who should lead such a coalition. In the mid-1920s, the Comintern, influenced by Nikolai Bukharin and Joseph Stalin, proposed that the leadership did not have to be communist where the communist parties were weak. This led to the 1927 disaster of the Goumdang massacre of the communists in China. After this episode, the Comintern, now firmly under Stalin, made a turnaround and took a rather dogmatic and uncompromising position. Accordingly, communist parties around the world were ordered not to make alliances unless they featured communist leadership. This policy led to the rout of the German Communist Party as it refused to unite with the German Social Democrats until the Nazis destroyed both. The united popular front policy did have its successful moments as well. In China in the 1930s and

early 1940s, and in Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s, the respective communist parties of these two regions used the policy to their advantage.

When the Tudeh proposed a united popular front policy, the hard-liners insisted that any such coalition with noncommunist forces should come under party leadership. This faction considered the Tudeh to be the working-class party, a perception that became a major point of dispute with the moderate faction. The hard-liners used their considerable organizational might within the party to win many converts to its cause. Leftist and extremist policies against the nationalist government were mostly, but not all, the result of this faction's courses of action, which changed only after the tide began to turn against them following the July 1952 uprising.

The moderate faction's principal members were Morteza Yazdi, Iraj Iskan-dari, Reza Radmanesh, Fereyduñ Keshavaz, Hossein Judat, and Nader Sharmini, the head of the party's Youth Organization. This group, although initially opposed to Mosaddeq, gradually came to accept his leadership. The moderates deemphasized the leadership role of the working class and the party, and believed that a united front with noncommunist forces did not necessitate party leadership. They had a more populist view of Marxism and considered the Tudeh not as the party of the working class but as a toolers party that included other deprived classes. In contrast to the hard-liners, they were open to leadership by the nationalists. The gradual change in Tudeh policy toward support for the nationalists at the cost of losing initiative after July 1952 was the result of this faction gaining the upper hand.

The moderates' gradual assumption of party leadership from July 1952 onward not only clarifies the change of policy toward the nationalist government but also may partially explain the party's ineffectual response to the coup. While much attention has been paid to the Tudeh's hostile reaction to Mosaddeq before July 1952, not much has been said about the consequences of the Tudeh's gradual shift, under the moderate faction, in support of Mosaddeq.³⁰ Under the moderate faction, particularly after March 1953, the Tudeh in effect delegated all initiative to the Mosaddeq government to the point where it was left with none of its own. When asked why the party had stored no weapons before the coup, Kianuri suggested that the party did not want to be seen as attempting to overthrow Mosaddeq.³¹

Sharmini and Kianuri were the two most controversial figures among the Tudeh leaders. Sharmini was the head of the party's Youth Organization until 1952 and maintained his influence over it through the time of the coup. The controversy surrounding him is that as the head of the Youth Organization he

proposed some of the most radical slogans, while at the same time he sided with the moderate faction on most issues. Under him the Youth Organization undetermined the authority of key personalities of the hard-line faction, attacking them for being soft and not revolutionary enough. These attacks were accompanied by the proposal of radical actions at party gatherings. At the same time, there are strong indications that Sharmini worked closely with the moderate faction on strategic party policies. Documents published by the shah's regime after the coup clearly mention this.³² Internal party leadership correspondence also indicates that the moderate faction was hesitant to remove Sharmini as the head of the Youth Organization and used the issue as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from the opposite faction.³³ Hence, Sharmini, who was a maverick of sorts, played a crucial role for the moderates in disarming the hard-liners by undermining their radical appeal. But by attacking the hard-liners, Sharmini and his followers also took a radical posture toward Mosaddeq. This factional struggle within the party overshadowed efforts at coordination with Mosaddeq during 1952–53, which would have been an important aspect of any Tudeh move against the coup in August 1953.

Throughout his memoirs, Kianuri claims he was a proponent of Mosaddeq after the July 1952 uprising, although he does admit that he, along with the other members of the leadership, opposed the oil nationalization movement before July 1952. Indeed he suggests that he was the one who warned the prime minister of the impending coup. Kianuri's claim is only partially true.³⁴

Among key hard-line personalities Kianuri ranked third, after Kambakhsh and Qasemi. Kambakhsh was not a theorist but a party functionary with strong personal connections to the Soviets. Qasemi was a staunch Stalinist and a dogmatic theorist who was the main force behind the party's anti-Mosaddeq policies during 1951–52. Both of these men had to leave the country by mid-1952. Hence, during the year before the coup Kianuri was the only hard-liner left in the party's five-man executive committee.

The key to understanding Kianuri's role is to note his theoretical differences with Qasemi. Kianuri believed in the hegemony of the proletariat in any coalition with nonproletariat forces, while Qasemi did not envision any coalition with the bourgeoisie, which he deemed as having betrayed the anti-imperialist movement. Qasemi's view was closer to Stalin's, while Kianuri was more moderate in this respect and closer to Mao Zedong; both, though, were at odds with the moderate advocates who proposed closer cooperation with Mosaddeq after July 1952, with or without party leadership.³⁵

To the above political differences between the two Tudeh factions must be added personal differences that helped fuel factionalism within the party. Jealousy of individual leaders was among the most significant of these factors. Documents related to the party's Fourth Plenum mentions the factions and personal differences between individual party leaders.

On differences within the central committee, the plenum identified two factions, one dominant and centered around Iskandari and Radmanesh and the other in opposition around Kianuri and Qasemi, but suggested that the disputes were mostly personal and due to character flaws. Nevertheless, the plenum placed general responsibility for the party's failure collectively on the executive committee of the time.³⁶

After the February 1949 attempt on the shah's life, there was no systematic contact between those party figures who fled abroad and those who remained inside the country. After the jailbreak of Tudeh leaders in December 1950, an executive committee was created in order to run the party's day-to-day affairs and to coordinate operations with the leadership abroad. Between 1950 and 1952, this eight-member committee was under the clear hegemony of the hard-liners, with Kianuri, Qasemi, Forutan, and Mahmud Bagrati forming a united bloc against Judat, Mohammad Bahrami (the party's first secretary), and Yazdi. Ali Olovri, the eighth member of the executive committee, seems to have had his own independent line and often wavered between the two. In 1952, Qasemi, Bagrati, and Forutan were sent to Moscow to represent the Tudeh's leadership based inside Iran at the Nineteenth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This development changed the balance in the executive committee in favor of the moderates. The party's misjudging of the oil nationalization movement and the events of summer 1952 may have helped remove the hard-line members of the executive committee. At any rate, as the 1953 events approached, the hard-line position within the executive committee was weakened considerably, with only Kianuri remaining as the faction's representative.

The two factions divided control over various party organs, which added to the general disorganization and inefficiency as factional competition grew more intense. While in a minority in the executive committee, Kianuri and supporters had a controlling presence in the Tehran Provincial Committee, the nerve center of the party network led by Amanallah Qoreishi, and in many of the neighborhood committees. They also had the ear of the TPMO's leadership, which meant effective control of that organization.³⁷ Kianuri was the person in overall charge of party organization, but the party liaison with the

TPMO was Judat, a member of the moderate line. Kambakhsh and Qasemi were the previous party liaisons, which suggests the hard-liners had control up to 1952. Nevertheless, it seems that the TPMO kept up its ties with Kianuri and bypassed Judat as he was accused by Kianuri, and later by the Tenth Plenum, for his incompetence in providing effective leadership.³⁸

It is clear that the moderates' control of the executive committee did not translate into overall control of the party. Nevertheless, the moderates did determine the Tudeh's general policy (e.g., toward Mosaddeq). It seems that much of the factional conflict during 1951-53 was focused on which wing presented the more radical and leftist view. It did not really matter what the real policy was as long as a leftist posture could be maintained to satisfy the many young party cadres. Thus, the hard-liners systematically attacked the moderates as being too soft, too rightist, and too willing to compromise with the enemies of the party and the working class. In this context, the moderate faction's control of the party's Youth Organization was important. The Youth Organization played a pivotal role in balancing the hard-line attack. The Tenth Plenum made a point of criticizing the Youth Organization and Sharnini.

Factionalism within the Tudeh had a number of consequences that significantly contributed to the party's behavior toward the oil nationalization movement and the 1953 coup. First, while the hard-liners were dominant in the leadership of the party (1951-52), the party completely missed the significance of the movement led by Mosaddeq and thus contributed to weakening the National Front. The hard-liners' dogmatic understanding of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and inflexible interpretation of the CPSU's guidelines were prime factors in determining the policy regarding Mosaddeq and the National Front.

Second, with the moderate arm's domination (1952-53), the Tudeh began slowly to see events in a new light and gradually changed course. This development meant that the party began to align its activities with those of the nationalist government at the cost of losing all independent initiative. Not wanting to alienate the Mosaddeq government, the Tudeh failed to prepare a contingency plan for coordination with the nationalist government to help it face off the coup. The party also failed to plan for a situation where it would have to continue without Mosaddeq.

Third, factional competition meant that the party leadership and various party organs became almost paralyzed at times and unable to perform with suitable efficiency. Much time and energy was wasted over professional and per-

sonal rivalries. Factionalism at the highest levels also meant that the leadership was unable to put forward resolute and effective policies in a timely manner, which worked to the party's disadvantage during the coup.

The Road to the Coup

While American intelligence reports for 1951-53 did not view the Tudeh as an immediate threat, the coup planners underscored the danger from communism in their preparations for Operation TPAJAX. Both the drafts of the operation and Donald Wilber's *Overthrow*, which was written a few months after the coup, note the expected violent reaction of the Tudeh and suggest steps to counter it. Wilber's history points to the July 21, 1953, demonstrations commemorating the events of the previous year as being dominated by the Tudeh, and states that party "participants far outnumbered those assembled by the National Front."³⁹

The American coup organizers used the threat of the Tudeh to woo more conservative elements in society to the anti-Mosaddeq camp and throw Mosaddeq and his cabinet off balance. For example, they arranged for threatening phone calls to be made in the Tudeh's name to religious leaders.⁴⁰ Likewise, they arranged for "black" mobs pretending to be Tudeh crowds, as we shall see below.

The Tudeh had intelligence throughout 1952-53 about a number of plots to overthrow the government. The Tudeh's assessment from the summer of 1952 was that a coup attempt was probable. As early as March 1953, the party had clear reason to suspect that preparations were being made for an overthrow.⁴¹ This suspicion became undeniable fact eight days before the first coup attempt on August 16. As early as winter 1952-53, the Tudeh leadership ordered the creation of vanguard cells made up of experienced party members working closely with the TPMO. According to an officer's memoirs, the TPMO identified key military installations, army depots, and command and control centers in the capital.⁴² The vanguard cells, equipped with the intelligence provided by the TPMO, were to react violently to any coup attempt. However, the leadership dismissed the cells before the coup, and the TPMO remained passive as the covert operation consumed the nationalist government. Lack of determination and factionalism among Tudeh leaders were the reasons behind this failure to prepare the party. While the Tudeh's intelligence reports lacked detail, particularly on the events leading to the August 1953 coup, they should have prepared the party for an eventual showdown.⁴³ Instead, the Tudeh

refused to prepare and arm itself. According to one source, the main reason for this was that they did not want to appear as if they were preparing to overthrow Mosaddeq.⁴⁴

It is clear that the Tudeh passed its intelligence on the pending coup to the prime minister on August 15. TPMO members had infiltrated the ranks of the coup organizers and had people in key positions. For example, Col. Mohannad Ali Mobasheri, a member of TPMO's three-man secretariat, was an active member of Tehran Military Governor, the center of the coup operation; Maj. Mehdi Homaiouni of the shah's Imperial Guard actually discovered and reported the August plot; Capt. Mohammad Puhad-dezh, an officer in the national police, who is in fact mentioned in *Overthrow*, was another TPMO member.⁴⁵

While the TPMO acquired the information, Kianuri, whose wife was a relative of Mosaddeq and thus gave him access to the inner quarter (*indam*) of the premier's household, was the executive committee member charged with contacting Mosaddeq by telephone.⁴⁶ Kianuri claims that he communicated with the prime minister on a number of occasions before the coup, including on August 13 and late on the night of August 14. The first contact led to postponement of the coup and the second to its failure on August 16. Other Tudeh leaders have questioned some of Kianuri's claims.⁴⁷ But Mosaddeq, who probably had his own independent sources as well, makes mention in his memoirs of at least one such telephone call.⁴⁸ Wilber's reference in *Overthrow* to postponement of the coup on August 14 due to the "indiscretion of one of the Iranian officers" is probably linked to the Tudeh's information on the coup received on August 13.⁴⁹ Wilber also notes Brig. Gen. Taqi Rahat's later remarks to the effect that he was informed of the coup at 5 P.M. on the evening of August 15, which corresponds to the second and most important piece of Tudeh intelligence on the coup, which was passed on to Mosaddeq. A TPMO officer also played a crucial role in the physical defeat of the coup on the evening of August 15. Lt. Ali Ashraf Shoja'ian had accompanied Col. Ne'matalah Nasiri and his Imperial Guard unit to Mosaddeq's residence to arrest him. Apparently on his own initiative he changed sides at the crucial moment and aided Mosaddeq's guards in arresting Nasiri and his men.⁵⁰

The period from August 16 to August 19 was a brief but crucial one, and the Tudeh leadership needed to react speedily and with focus and determination if the situation was to be turned around. Instead, chaos and a lack of resolve prevailed. On August 16, the morning after the initial coup attempt failed, the general situation in Tehran was tense and electric. The shah had fled

the country and was implicated in the attempt to overthrow the constitutional government. At this point, TPAJAX seemed doomed as supporters of the National Front and the Tudeh poured into the streets in defense of Mosaddeq. A broad array of emotionally charged, spontaneous activities took place during the fateful days of August 16–18.

The popular sentiment expressed in the streets of Tehran on August 16 may be divided into three categories. All three groups of demonstrators had come to support Mosaddeq but with different perspectives. The first group consisted of supporters of the National Front whose slogans typically targeted the shah, the Pahlavi dynasty, and the coup, but not necessarily the monarchy. Certainly, Hossein Fateni's fiery speech that day, in Baharestan Square in front of the Majles, radicalized the front's supporters. Fateni had always been somewhat more radical than other front and Mosaddeq cabinet members. His speech, which attacked the shah and called for his abdication, fired the crowd to the point where even some antimonarchy slogans were heard. But even he apparently did not directly call for the overthrow of the monarchy or the establishment of a republic.⁵¹

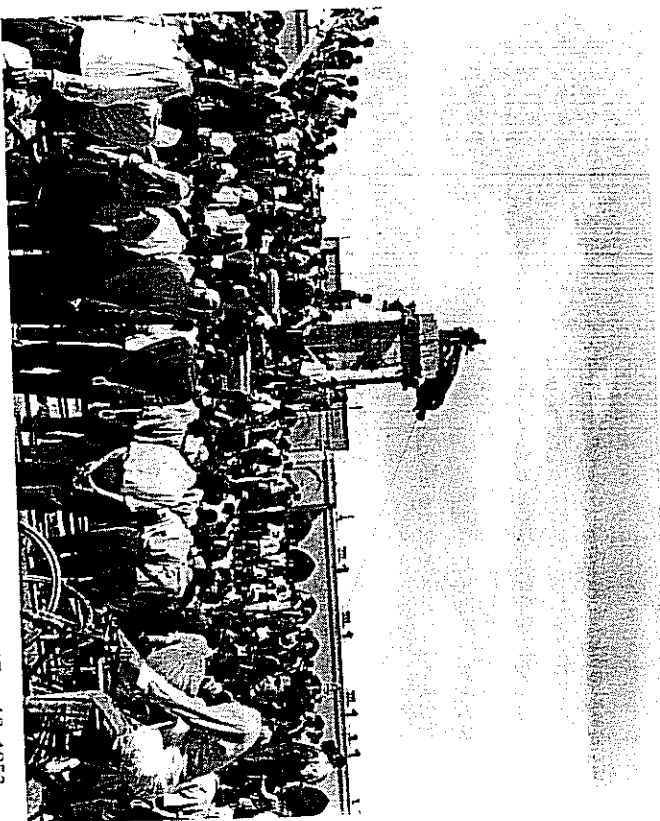
The second group was comprised of Tudeh supporters who were already more radical and who more openly targeted the monarchy, demanding sovereignty for the people in light of the new situation. But even here there was no sign of widespread demand for a republic. The third group constituted ordinary people who could have been attracted to either of the above two according to the situation.⁵²

Here, the "black" crowds can be put in perspective. In *Overthrow*, Wilber suggests that the coup planners had thought of using such a device as part of the overall scheme to destabilize the situation.⁵³ But it is not clear to what extent they were actually used or how effective they were. According to Mark Gasiorowski (see his chapter in this volume), by distributing fifty thousand dollars a phony Tudeh mob was created. This crowd then began to attack symbols of monarchy on August 17. Gasiorowski also asserts that the black crowd was joined by actual Tudeh supporters and others.

While the situation was highly charged and chaotic at this point with no clear indication as to who was actually in charge, it seems apparent that the Tudeh had no idea that the black crowds existed. Clearly, the Tudeh leadership was unaware of such activities.⁵⁴ Interviews with six rank-and-file Tudeh and Youth Organization members also suggest that there was no Tudeh awareness of black crowds on the street level. All those interviewed were either in the streets of Tehran during August 16–19 or were well connected to the party.⁵⁵

This lack of awareness strongly suggests that the CIA appraisal of the crowd's role is probably exaggerated. While no certain conclusion can be made on this point, it is difficult to see how the crowds could have materialized in any significant and determining manner without the Tudeh picking up some signals along the way.

Whether with the help of the black mobs acting as a trigger mechanism or purely due to the genuine spontaneity of the crowds in the streets, the general situation after the failure of the first coup attempt turned radical. At this point the Tudeh and the National Front were on the same side regardless of their rocky relationship during the previous period. On the morning of August 17 the angry crowd began to attack symbols of the monarchy and demanded its abolition. This was a major shift and a challenge to the National Front and its constitutional premier.



An anti-shah crowd tearing down a statue of Reza Shah on August 17 or 18, 1953. By August 19, the tide had completely shifted as pro-shah forces took control of the streets of Tehran. Copyright © 2002 AP/Wide World Photos.

Meanwhile, on August 18 the Tudeh leadership opened a decision-making process that led to the party's factual demand for the elimination of the monarchy and establishment of a "democratic republic." Posing the latter demand seems to have been a major blunder because, coming from a pro-Moscow party, it smacked of the Soviet-dominated satellites of Eastern Europe. De-manding a republic of any kind would have been problematic and would have alienated Mosaddeq since he had never suggested he was in favor of abolishing the constitutional monarchy. How did this gaffe occur?

According to one source, the party's Tehran Provincial Committee, a hotbed of the hard-line faction, proposed the "republic" slogan to the party executive committee on August 17.⁵⁶ It seems that the events unfolding in the streets had a direct bearing on this decision. The Tudeh considered itself the vanguard party and, as such, had to try to stay one step ahead of the masses in order to be able to lead them. Certainly, the hard-liners within the party emphasized this role more than the other faction.

A few hours later, still on August 17, the party's executive committee gave its response to the "republic" proposal. The counterproposal was even more radical and called for demanding a "democratic republic." Subsequently, Tudeh members were instructed to join demonstrations for the new cause.⁵⁷ By late August 17 and August 18, the role of the Tudeh in street demonstrations was more pronounced, making it even more difficult to assess the impact of the fabricated crowds even if they did exist.

The Tudeh's new policy of demanding a democratic republic was announced on the morning of August 18 just before impending street battles and chaos. This new slogan was a major change for the party. It contradicted the policy, in effect since March 1953, of strengthening the nationalist government. Overnight, the Tudeh shifted from supporting the constitutional monarchy through Mosaddeq's government to demanding its overthrow. Moreover, the Tudeh demanded that the constitutional premier go against his own mandate due to the extraordinary situation. This led to panic by the nationalist regime, which did not really intend to generate such a radical reaction. The government therefore ordered the military into the streets on August 18, resulting in the arrest of many Tudeh activists, the withdrawal of progovernment supporters, and a hostile military in control of the city. One Tudeh estimate suggests that on that day up to six hundred mid- and low-level Tudeh activists were arrested in Tehran alone, severely damaging the party's network.⁵⁸

Why did the moderate faction, comprising a majority in the executive committee, accept the new policy? Did the Tudeh not fear that Mosaddeq

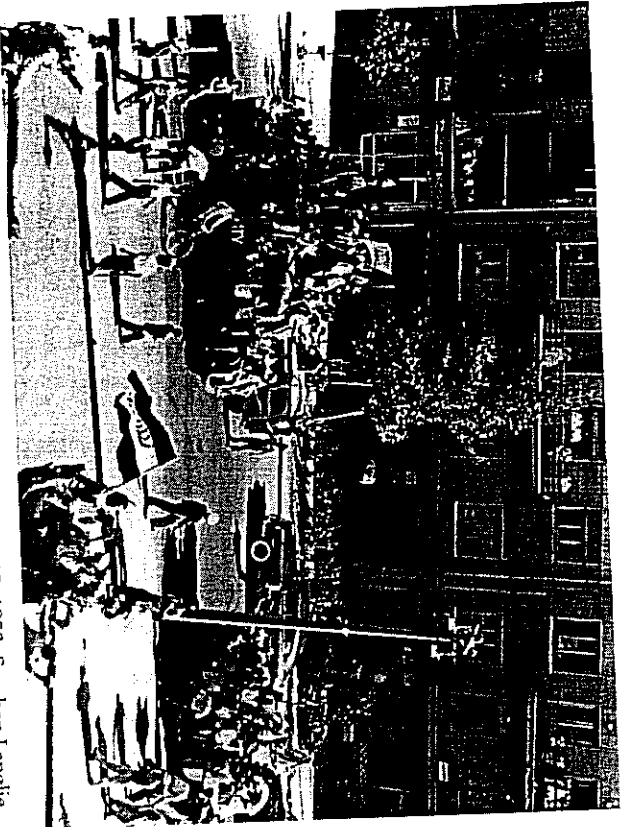
might not accept the party's demand for a democratic republic? It seems that for a brief moment the party leadership, influenced by the radicalized political atmosphere, opted for attempting to pull the nationalists to their side. Militant street demonstrations and Fatemi's more radical posture may have helped cause the leadership to change course for a brief moment. Furthermore, Fatemi's radical tone could have persuaded some party leaders that a split had developed within the ranks of the National Front that was worth exploring. One party document shows that the Tudeh was aware that Mosaddeq might not accept the party's demand, but it opted for convincing the premier to accept the new policy through resistance and pressure.⁵⁹ As suggested, this change of course was brief and the Tudeh soon shifted directions again and stopped its challenge of Mosaddeq. This episode should be understood in the context of the charged political atmosphere of the time.

On the evening of August 18, fearing a loss of control, Mosaddeq ordered the military to clear the streets of all demonstrators. Having a large number of its activists arrested and not wanting to alienate the premier any further, the party vacillated again and ordered a demobilization. On the morning of August 19, it became clear that the coup had been rejuvenated and the nationalist government was in danger. One Tudeh leader has suggested that the party contacted Mosaddeq and offered to resist the coup but that Mosaddeq declined and suggested that he had things under control.⁶⁰

Published correspondence between the party's executive committee inside Iran and the leadership abroad sheds more light on the condition of the party's top levels and their reaction to the August 19 coup.⁶¹ According to these documents, on the morning of August 19 Ali Olovvi, a member of the executive committee, suggested holding demonstrations and a national strike in opposition to the coup. At this point the party's Tehran Provincial Committee was notified to prepare the ground.⁶² Olovvi's proposal, however, was deferred by the other members until Mosaddeq's approval could be secured.⁶³ By noon, however, no contact with Mosaddeq had been established. By afternoon, when the party finally began discussing whether to take action, Mosaddeq's government had been overthrown.

How can the Tudeh's overall reaction to the coup and its vacillation be explained and put within the context of Tudeh factionalism? The party's policy clearly fluctuated from strengthening Mosaddeq in March 1953, to pressuring him to declare a democratic republic on August 17-18, to demobilizing late on August 18 and taking no action pending Mosaddeq's consent.

One overall explanation is that the five members of the party's executive



An anti-Mosaddeq crowd on Shah Reza Avenue, August 19, 1953. Stephen Langlie Collection, GB165-0351-2.1.3, Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony's College, Oxford. Courtesy Stephen Langlie USAF/MMAAG.

committee may at some point have come to the conclusion that the party could survive the storm, as it did in 1949. Bizhan Jazani, some twenty years later, made the following important observation: "The leadership of the party thought that the 1953 [coup] was only a defeat for the nationalist movement . . . and that the party, and its underground organizations, could continue underground activities."⁶⁴ This, however, only partially answers the problem of a lack of resolve and coherent policy within the party leadership. Factionalism and a state of paralysis at the top complete the picture.

The party leadership collectively was suspicious of Mosaddeq, but a subset began to change policy after the summer of 1952. The hegemony of the moderate faction contributed to the party's loss of initiative vis-à-vis the nationalist government, particularly after March 1953. As if wanting to compensate for its attacks on Mosaddeq during 1951–52, the party leadership refused to prepare for the coming showdown and left all initiative to the nationalists. While the moderate faction's control over the party was not absolute, it could and did ini-

tiate general policy. Thus, while the Military Organization was ready to take steps to prepare the party and the Youth Organization in the months preceding the coup, the order arrived from the Tudeh leadership to cease activities so as not to alienate the Mosaddeq government.

The Tudeh clearly lost its balance due to the speed of events and, even more importantly, due to a lack of internal unity and cohesion. Only a unified leadership could have processed the incoming information and come up with an appropriate decision. In the absence of such conditions, the party leaders were reduced to fighting among themselves while trying to maintain their revolutionary posture and choose a proper course of action.

The Coup Aftermath

It was only after Mosaddeq's overthrow that the Tudeh leadership began to take a number of steps to prepare the party for armed resistance. These included the creation, in September 1953, of a center for resisting the coup. Three members of the party's executive committee and three members of TPMO were assigned to command the center.⁶⁵ The idea was for the TPMO to train and arm some two thousand party members and to establish contacts with the Qashqa'i tribe's leaders in order to wage guerrilla war in coordination with them in the northern and central parts of the country. None of these measures resulted in any concrete action. The Qashqa'i chiefs ultimately refused to cooperate, and the TPMO was unable to obtain adequate armaments due to the repressive atmosphere of the postcoup period.

The official Tudeh reaction to the question of the causes of the party's failure came during its historic Fourth Plenum, held in Moscow in July 1957. The plenum criticized the party for its policy toward the National Front and for not recognizing the progressive nature of the oil nationalization movement.⁶⁶ Calling its policies toward the nationalist government sectarian and leftist, the party also suggested that its policy between August 16 and 19 had been incorrect when party demonstrators pulled down the shah's statues and asked for a people's democratic republic.⁶⁷ The party admitted to its state of paralysis and blamed it on the leadership inside Iran while suggesting that the leadership abroad had failed to provide help and guidelines. The party attributed the leadership's weakness to the lack of internal democracy within the Tudeh, the absence of close bonds between the leadership and rank-and-file members, the leadership's low level of theoretical knowledge, and the existence of deep differences at top levels of the party.

With the discovery of the TPMO and arrest of its members in the summer of 1954, the fate of the Tudeh was sealed. Through its intelligence network, the TPMO had acted as a shield for the party and had played a determining role in preserving the Tudeh immediately after Mosaddeq's overthrow. During 1954–58, with the decimation of the TPMO complete, the Tudeh network was compromised and wiped out as well. Many high- and middle-ranking Tudeh leaders were arrested or forced to flee the country. The arrest and execution of Khosrow Roozbeh in 1957–58 signaled the end of this process.

Based on the above analysis of the Tudeh's forces on the ground and its internal divisions, it seems clear that the perceived Tudeh threat, as feared by the perpetrators of the coup, was not real. The party had neither the numbers, nor the popularity, nor a plan to take over state power with any hope of holding on to it. Similar to any fraternal communist party, the Tudeh had a long-term goal of seeing Iran, and for that matter the rest of the world, join the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. But this did not have much to do with the concrete case of Iran where, in the Tudeh's terminology, objective conditions for a takeover did not exist. At best the party had come to conclude that to ward off imperialist domination of Iran, it had to throw its support behind Mosaddeq's government. One Tudeh leader at the time has explained the party's policy as follows: "[T]he reality is that we did not want Mosaddeq to be overthrown. . . . well, we understood that there is no possibility for the party to come to power, we did not have the strength."⁶⁸ Even the party's demand for a democratic republic, misguided as it was, was an attempt to pull Mosaddeq into the Tudeh camp, not overthrow him.

The fact that the Tudeh neither had the intention nor the power to oust Mosaddeq does not mean it could not have reacted to, and even reversed, the coup. We now know that the 1953 coup was successful only by the narrowest of margins. Rarely does one witness the fate of a nation depending on such of tenuous circumstances. Supporters of the coup in the military were not sure of their own strength until the final moments. The American operatives were ordered to leave the country. Many military units and their officers became fence sitters, waiting to see who would win in order to be sure to join the right side. The Tudeh had adequate support in Tehran and in the military to react effectively. Of course, it was impossible to predict whether the party would be successful or not, particularly during such tense and stressful moments as existed between August 16 and August 19. But the Tudeh considered itself a revolutionary vanguard party and, as such, was expected to react forcefully. Consider-

ing the fact that the organization was decimated and in a state of inaction between 1953 and 1958, any other fate would have been preferable.

For the Tudeh to have been effective in August 1953, it would have had to take care of two prerequisites. It needed a resolute, cohesive, and insightful leadership. It also required a more trustful and amicable relationship with the National Front. The Tudeh lacked both. In other words, what the Tudeh lacked in 1953 was competent leadership.

Because U.S. field intelligence suggested that the Tudeh was not an immediate threat to Iran, it seems that the decision to launch TPAJAX must have been made at higher echelons of the U.S. government. This decision seems to have had little to do with on-the-ground realities and much to do with the ideological imperatives of the period: the cold war.⁶⁹

Other chapters in this collection cover this aspect of the puzzle thoroughly. Here, it should briefly be noted that the U.S. perception of the Tudeh and Soviet threat, or communism in general, should be seen from three angles. First the American competition with the Soviet Union after World War II had already triggered the cold war. Episodes such as the Soviet take-over and domination of Eastern Europe, especially the 1948 crisis over Czechoslovakia, and the Berlin airlift were all events within this drama. The success of the Chinese Revolution, the launching of the Korean War, and the outbreak of war in Indochina only fueled the cold war mentality.

Second, the American perception of the Tudeh and communism in Iran did not help Iran's case. The Azerbaijan crisis of 1945–46, where a Soviet backed regional party tried to secede while Iran was under Soviet occupation diluted the U.S. view. The Tudeh did not have much to do with this episode and was itself a victim of events as the Soviets forced the party to support the movement.⁷⁰ Outright Tudeh identification with Soviet policy in Iran between 1944 and 1951 also added to Washington's negative assessment. Finally, in the United States the 1953 coup in Iran coincided with the anticommunist hysteria commonly identified with the activities of Sen. Joseph McCarthy. This anticommunist atmosphere ruined many careers and lives, both inside and outside the United States.

The 1953 coup in Iran cannot simply be understood, as portrayed in Donald Wilber's history, as an attempt to save Iran from falling into the Soviet orbit. There were many other variables involved. An important aspect of the equation is that the main justification for the coup—the Tudeh, and by extension Soviet, threat—in retrospect seems implausible.