The United States, Great Britain and Iran: Communication, Miscommunication, Communication Crisis

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Abstract: The history of the U.S.-Iran relations has been a history of conflict and misunderstanding, starting with the failure of the 1940s oil talks with the British and the Americans to the present day, with Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's overt and provocative discourse against the U.S. and Israel. This article argues that miscommunication lies at the heart of Iran's relations with the U.S. and Britain. Miscommunication stems from a conflict or "clash of interests." Indeed, while the American and British priorities focused upon oil interests, the Iranians, led by their nationalist Prime Minister, Muhammad Mosaddeq saw nationalization of the oil industryas essential to the democratization process in his country. He perceived nationalization as a quintessential step to achieving freedom in Iran. While Premier Mosaddeq was trying to reach a deal with the British and the Americans, the latters were secretly dealing with the ways to get rid of him because they perceived him as an obstacle to the West's oil interests. Miscommunication led to a communication crisis, eventually on August 19, 1953, the CIA orchestrated a *coup d'état* against Mosaddeq, thus opening a new chapter in Iranian history.

Keywords: Communication crisis- Iran-Great Britain- US- Oil- Mosaddeq

Introduction

This paperpurports to examine the diplomatic communication within international relations betweenIran, on the one hand, and Britain and the U.S., on the other hand. Diplomatic communication was at the heart of the 1950's oil controversy that affected the international relations between Iran and the West. Communication between the two parties, especially between Iranian Prime Minister,Mohammad Mosaddeq, and the British government about nationalization of the Iranian oil industry was very difficult particularly because of the clash of interests that dominated the oil talks.

Indeed, the British were not ready to compromise their huge profits from Iranian oil that they enjoyed since the time of the British Empire. On the other hand, Iran was not ready to compromise its commitment to freedom and independence, by maintaining nationalization as a prerequisite for that independence. Therefore, communication ended up in miscommunication that eventually led to a communication crisis with theCIA's orchestrated*coup* against Mosaddeq on August 19, 1953 with the collaboration of the British Secret Service (MI6).

This paper argues that the crisis of communication that characterized the diplomatic communication between Iran and the West was caused by the hidden intentions of Britain, namely overthrowing Mosaddeq. However, that decision was being prepared behind closed doors. Indeed, in public, the British and the Americans after them, were showing their commitment to reach a deal withMosaddeq in order to put an end to the communication problem.

This paper is divided into two main sections. The first section deals with the oil nationalization issue under the statesmanship of Mosaddeq. The second section discusses the 1953 *coup* against Mosaddeq and its consequences.

1. Mohammad Mosaddeq and nationalization of the oil industry

1.1.Biography and political philosophy

This section aims at introducing Mohammad Mosaddeq the Man, the nationalist and architect of the nationalization of Iranian oil as well as the statesman who vehemently fought Western imperialism[1]. Mosaddeq was a major figure in Iran's modern history. According to FarhadDiba (1986: 115), he "was the choice of a nation which was longing to establish its dignity and to make a stand for its rights and sovereignty." Diba goes further to say:

> *No other political figure of the day embodied the will of the people in his principles as Mossadegh did, both publicly and privately. Furthermore, no politician had the stature commensurate with the importance of national dignity. . . . Mossadegh felt close to the people, and they to him, and this bond served for a while to overcome the tremendous pressures both internal and external. Once this bond was broken, it took twenty-five years to repair the link but, by that time, the ghost of Mossadegh was not enough to reset the course* (115).

[1]Sscholars like Mary Ann Heiss (1997) and ErvandAbrahamian (2001), described the triangular U.S.-Great Britain-Iran conflict in the 1950s as an issue of nationalism versus imperialism. This was evident in Heiss's book, *Empire and Nationhood : The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954*.

Mosaddeq taught at Tehran's School of Law and Political Science (Katouzian, 2009: ix). He had an aristocratic background, coming from a "mostowfi" (accountant) and landed family (Abrahamian, 2008: 103). In his career, he had the privilege to be a writer, administrator, lawyer, parliamentarian, and a charismatic politician who embraced constitutional rule. In fact, he viewed the Pahlavi dynasty of the Shahs, set up in 1925, as both corrupt and unconstitutional, which cost him political exile and even prison sentences on July 26, 1940.

Mosaddeq was also a nationalist who overtly and passionately opposed foreign intervention in Iran. Indeed, he stood firmly against British colonialism. His pledge to protect the nation from unwanted outsiders and his incarnation of nationalistic pride made many of his countrymen identify with him and (naturally) facilitated his victory. This, combined with his opposition to domestic corruption, made him pass in the eyes of the Americans and the British for a potentially dangerous obstacle to their economic and political interests in the country (Gasiorowski & Byrne: xiv).

Mosaddeq's reputation was closely relted to the Nationalist Movement which emerged in the early 1950s. On April 28, 1951, the Parliament named Mosaddeq new Prime Minister by a vote of 79–12, at the head of a coalition of the reform-oriented National Front (Gasiorowski & Byrne: xiv). In describing the National Front, Stephen Kinzer (2008) states that it is a "coalition of political parties, trade unions, civic groups, and other organizations devoted to strengthening democracy and limiting the power of foreigners in Iran" (71). Abrahamian (2008) observes that campaigning against Britain as well as against the Shah, Mosaddeq established the National Front (Jebe'eh-e Melli), drawing to it diverse middle-class parties and associations (115).

Thus, Mosaddeq committed himself to two important causes: "strict constitutionalism" at the domestic level and an equally strict policy of "negative equilibrium" abroad to gain independence from foreign control (Abrahamian, 2008: 114). "Negative equilibrium," on the other hand, is a program that presupposes that in order to promote the national sovereignty of Iran, a policy of "non-alliance" with the United States and the Soviet Union was required (Poulson: 168). In Mosaddeq's conception of "negative equilibrium," "negative" described Iran's "non-aligned status" (Poulson: 168). He believed that Iran should not allow the establishment of military bases on Iranian soil. Furthermore, it should not accept economic aid from the United States or the Soviet Union[2]. In fact, the choice to side with neither of the superpowers would create an "equilibrium" guaranteeing that they could not become involved in Iranian affairs[3].

Mosaddeq designed his policy of "negative equilibrium" to counter Ahmad Qavam's[4] stance of "positive equilibrium" (Poulson: 168). He argued that any agreement with the superpowers would push them to intrude in Iranian affairs. Mosaddeq's course of action was nationalist as he contended that if the Iranian people believed in their leaders, they would not be in need of economic and political help from foreign countries[5]. He argued that traditional

[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid.
[4]In the beginning of his career, he worked for the royal court of Nasereddin Shah. He wrote the letter signed by Mozaffaredin Shah in acceptance of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. At the time, he had the title of *Dabir-e Hozoor* (Private Secretary). Qavam played an essential role in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. He served as Prime Minister many times during Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties. He played a substantialrole in holding the USSR back from separating Iran's northern states twice (Wikipedia).
[5]Ibid.

politicians had threatened "Iran's very existence with their misguided policy of "positive equilibrium" with the great powers (qtd. InAbrahamian, 2008: 114). Mosaddeq warned that this policy pressed other powers to claim equal concessions, which jeopardized national sovereignty. He embraced the cause of oil nationalization and insisted that the government ought to take command of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. He asserted that Iran had "the inalienable right to have full control over the production, sale and export of its own oil resources."[6] Indeed, Iran had not been able to produce its own oil since the AIOC produced it. The following section deals with the nationalization of the oil industry and its repercussions on the diplomatic relations between Iran and Britain.

2. Nationalization of the oil industry

This section is aprelude for the following one, namely the 1953 *coup* against Mosaddeq. Miscommunication between Mosaddeq and his Western (American and British) interlocutors led to a crisis of communication that culminated in the *coup* against him. Also, communication breakdown was primarily the result of the American and the British insincere intentions. Indeed, they were planning to oust him while they were pretending to be willing to engage in serious oil negotiations. To sum up, communication crisis led to the *coup* and its consequences on both Iran and the US-Iranian diplomatic relations. The origins of the 1953 *coup* can be traced back to the Anglo-Iranian oil crisis of 1951-53; the latter was in turn at the origin of the unsuccessful petroleum talks at the end of World War II (Abrahamian, 2001: 184).

In 1948, the Iranian Parliament(Majlis) rejected a 1945 Soviet Proposal for an oil concession in the Northern provinces despite the fact that it offered Iran equal shares in profits, management and distribution (184-85). The Soviet proposal was not in line with Mosaddeq's nationalist ambitions. He rejected it on the grounds that it would give Moscow a bigger hand in the north and would motivate those Westerners looking for concessions and contracts in the whole country (Abrahamian, 2001: 185). Unsurprisingly, the British Ministry of Fuel warned the Foreign Office:

> *The strength of Britain lies in the fact that we hold concessions all over the world, in which we are ourselves developing the oil and controlling its distribution and disposal. It would weaken our position if countries began to develop their own oil. If Persia*[7] *began to develop her own oil in the north, it might not be very long before she would want to do this in the south also. We should not encourage them to develop their own oil* (qtd. in Abrahamian 2001, 185).

Obviously then, from the beginning the British position was clear: its main priority was control over Iranian oil, thus leaving Iran completely dependent on Britain for the production and management of its own oil. Mosaddeq's determination to preserve Iranian oil for Iranians and his concern over the foreign presence surely sent a signal to the British that he was the wrong person

[6] Ibid.

[7] The name Persia changed into Iran in 1934.

to deal with. Mosaddeq would have never guessed at that point that his very nationalism would lead, just two years later, to his historic downfall.

More importantly, the Majlis declined a Supplement to the 1933 Agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (Abrahamian, 2001: 185). The 1933 Agreement, which prolonged the Company's oil concession for an additional thirty years on terms that were not advantageous to Iran, had been imposed by the Company with the support of the British government (Katouzian, 2009: xi). It had generated much discontent and hostility among Iranians, knowing that the company had engaged in troubled relations with different Iranian governments since World War I.

Britain took tremendous advantage of Iranian oil; indeed, in 1949-50, the AIOChad in Iran the largest refinery in the world. It was the second largest exporter of crude petroleum and it had the third largest oil reserves and supplied 85 per cent of the fuel needs of the British navy (Abrahamian, 2001: 185). Negotiated secretly, the Supplementary Agreement was not in the advantage of Iran. It provided for an increase in Iranian royalties from four to six shillings per ton. Thus, its share of the company profits would rise from 17 to 24 per cent. Iran believed it should have 50 per cent, yet the company would not accept that and argued that Iran should be thankful for the AIOC's « civilizing mission», like turning « deserts » into growing towns (185). In addition, it refused to decide on deadlines on previous promises to promote Iranians to technical-managerial positions, arguing that only few had the required skills to qualify for these « responsible » positions (185). Depriving Iranians of those « responsible » positions meant that, obviously, Britain had the monopoly of Iranian oil, with all the advantages that it entailed. Furthermore, it increasingly denied Iranians key positions, and this would naturally turn against Britain in the long run. In fact, over the years, the Iranians had grown suspicious not only of Britain but also of all foreign powers.

With the backing of the middle-class and using strategies like petitions and street demonstrations, Mosaddeq called up a mass movement advocating the nationalization of the oil industry (Abrahamian, 2008: 116). With a general strike in the oil industry commanded by the Tudeh in 1951, Mosaddeq pressuredParliament in May 1951 to accept his nationalization bill and give him the required vote to form a government to put into effect the nationalization law (116).

Thus Mosaddeq's main political accomplishments was the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, which had been under British authority through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) since 1913, today known as British Petroleum (BP) (Gasiorowski & Byrne: xv). On May 1, 1951Mosaddeq, by nationalizing the AIOC, called off the oil concession that was meant to expire in 1993 and expropriated its assets. The AIOC was considered by the British as their most important overseas concern; it did in fact create for them significant amounts of revenues. Mosaddeq shed light on his nationalization policy in a June 21, 1951 speech. He stressed that the oil returns could be used in an efficient way to fight the ills plaguing the Iranian people, such as poverty, disease and backwardness. He also observed that by putting an end to the power of the British Company, Iranianswould rid themselves of corruption. Protesting Iran's dependence on foreign powers, he pointed out in his speech that:

> *Once this tutelage has ceased, Iran will have achieved its economic and political independence. The Iranian state prefers to take over the production of petroleum*

> *itself. The company should do nothing else but return its property to the rightful owners. The nationalization law provides that 25% of the net profits on oil be set aside to meet all the legitimate claims of the company for compensation. . . . It has been asserted abroad that Iran intends to expel the foreign oil experts from the country and then shut down oil installations. Not only is this allegation absurd; it is utter invention . . . .* (Web Sources[8]*.)*

Mosaddeq's speech is an obvious evidenceof his nationalism and his willingness to move forward with an economically and politically sovereign Iran. He famously claimed that the best way to rule Iran was through democracy and social justice. He also argued that silence at foreign intervention and corruption in Iran was the equivalent of sin. These ideas have resonated in the minds of millions of Iranians then and now and attested to the Prime Minister's determination to put Iran on the side of progress.

In October (1951), all British nationals were dismissed from Iran, which was humiliating to the British position (De MoraesRuehsen: 468). Mosaddeq's appropriation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had brought about a new chapter, namely "the end of Pax Britannica," and the rise of the United States on the scene (468).

The AIOC immediately launched an economic boycott that was backed by the other major international oil companies. In the meantime, the British government undertook a campaign to destabilize Mosaddeq's regime. Thus, oil nationalization created a serious crisis with Great Britain. In support of AIOC, the British government withdrew the company personnel, blocked oil exports from Iran and submitted a complaint to the United Nations (Abrahamian, 2008: 117). In response, Mosaddeq went to New York to defend the Iranian stance. His arguments appeared in a report titled "Text of the Report Submitted by Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, on November 25, 1951 Upon his Return From the United States of America and Egypt." In that report,hepoints out that he went to New York, to the Security Council of the United Nationsto answer the "groundless complaint" that the British government had made to the Security Council, and defend the Iranian Nation's rights (1). He further observes that Britain's criticismwas that Iran had not implemented the decision of the International Court of Justice about the interim protective measures concerning the former Anglo-Iranian Oil Company case, and that the objection of the Iranian Government to the execution of that decision might jeopardize international peace, and that consequently, the Security Council ought to tackle this issue, and make the Iranian Government respect that resolution (1). Defending his position, Mosaddeq argued that the Iranian government had never jeopardized international peace, and that the Iranian government could not be held accountable in the event the United Kingdom, "under baseless pretexts,"invaded the country (2). The Iranian Delegation's role in the Security Council was to prove that the latter lacked any "jurisdiction" over the conflict between the Iranian Government and the ex-Oil Company in which the U.K. had illicitlyintruded (2).Mosaddeq adds that he had the chance to:

[8] *Mohammad Mosaddegh*. (http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Mohammad-Mosaddegh.pdf).

> *Inform the council of the past history of the Iranian Oil, the cruelties of the former Company, the transgression of its agents in interfering in our internal affairs, plundering the oil revenues, depriving the Iranian people from the minimum standard of living . . . and the defective Agreement of 1933. I also brought to the attention of the Council the legitimate desires and wishesof the Iranian people to enjoy henceforward their full political and economic independence . . . and in particular not to allow any State to intervene in their internal affairs*(2).

The Security Council met on October 15, 16, 17, and 19, 1951to discuss the oil issue. In the final meeting of the council, and contrary to the British demand, "the Council so ruled that pending the Decision of the International Court of Justice as to its competence, the case will be adjourned" (2-3).Criticizing the British government, Mosaddeq claimed that it aimed at harming both the Iranian government and the Iranian people (3). As far as the oil issue is concerned, contended Mosaddeq, Britain's ultimate aimwas that it ought to be "refined, transported and distributed by them" as earlier. Also, they want to be given all the oil in Iran at a very low cost "under a contract"(3).It was no surprise thatMosaddeq was viewed as "a double-edged sword," threatening the oil company and the British Empire, on the one hand, and the Shah and his control of the army, on the other hand (Abrahamian, 2008: 116).

Ironically, Islamists mistrusted Mosaddeq for his commitment to secular nationalism (Abrahamian, 2008: xxii). Thus, the secularism of the western culture, which was expected to serve as a bridge between Iran and the West, was not to the benefit of that relation. Indeed, economic interests blurred every other consideration, turning Mosaddeq from a potential partner to an enemy. Here again miscommunication is apparent. Indeed, despite his Western educationand his dedication to Western democracy, Mosaddeq's attempts at communicating with both Britain and the United States ended in communication crisis and diplomatic debacle.

Thus in trying to apply "the clash of civilizations" paradigm in this context, one can argue that surprisingly, the secularism embraced by Mosaddeq was not welcomed by the west, and ironically, the Shah's twenty-five-year Western-backed rule gave way to Islamic fundamentalism, which both the United States and Great Britain viewed as a serious enemy force that jeopardized the Western secularism. There are grounds for arguing that the situation was that of "an imposed" clash by the West nurtured by the West, even if it did not admit it. The oil crisis was very important in the unfolding events eventually triggering the 1953 *coup*.

To add to the already shakydiplomatic relations between Iran and Great Britain, the AIOC failed to deal with many of Iran's other complaints, such as the extent of the contract that ran till 1992, the payment of royalties in pounds, which tied Iran to the sterling area, the sale of oil to Iran at international market rates instead of local production rates(Abrahamian, 2001: 186). The company was considered as a «typical colonial power manipulating the host government by making and unmaking ministers, governors, army commanders, Majlis deputies and local tribal chiefs » (186). Abrahamian points out that in being rigid, both the oil company and the British government presumed that Iran would accept the British terms, and immediate nationalization came as a surprise for many and led to a communication crisis that affected the diplomatic relations not only between Iran and Britain but also Iran and the United States. Diba argues that

> *[t]he rejection, by the oil committee, of the Supplemental Oil Agreement of 7 July 1949, marked the beginning of the stand by the Majlis toward obtaining a better deal from the oil company, both in terms of revenues and of administration. On the other hand, it sent a message to the British that the wishes of the British Government did not have to be systematically approved by the Majlis. "This awakening so shook the foundation of Whitehall's political paternalism towards Iran that it may well have been the origin of the reaction which set in following Mossadegh's assumption of the premiership, culminating in Britain's role in his overthrow* (102).

This paternalism is shownin Sir Francis Shepherd's dispatches to the Foreign Office, wherein he assured the British Government "that the Agreement will be driven through"Parliament within a couple of months" (102). The British wanted to push the Shah as well as the Prime Minister to sign the agreement. Shepherd even observed that the Americans were found to be 'most helpful', that is they similarly pressured the Shah to comply with the proposals.[9] Therefore, this miscommunication between the different partners emanated from the conflict of interests that dominated the situation at the time. Iran's yearning for an independent management of its natural resources fell on deaf ears on the part of its Western interlocutors as the latter's ultimate objective had been control over Iran's profitable oil industry.

In rejecting the Supplementary agreement, parliament nationalized the oil industry and elected Mosaddeq as Premier because he was the only candidate willing to implement the nationalization law (Abrahamian, 2001: 186). Upon the assumption of his office, in April 1951, he pledged fair competition, created a National Iranian Oil Company and invited British employees to work for the new authority (186-87).

The British realized the weight of Mosaddeq in relation to nationalization. They understood that he was firmly committed to make Iran obtain full control over the oil industry. They also came to the conclusion that they could not allow Iran to gain control, and that the only means for preserving its « vital interests » and ending the crisis was by ousting him (Abrahamian, 2001: 187). The British realized that for Mosaddeq, his most important objective was « national sovereignty », which meant « control over extraction, production, and distribution of oil" (187). The only means of achieving genuine independence was through stopping British control over the oil industry; control had to do with deciding about the quantity of oil to be produced, when to produce it and where to sell it (187-88). In case Iran had the power of control, it could influence international prices and even keep oil « underground for future generations» in this way, it could sell just what was needed to purchase basic goods (188). The Ministry of Fuel notified the U.S. State Department:

> *Musaddiq would be content to see the industry running at a low level without foreign management. This raises a problem: the security of the free world is dependent on large quantities of oil from Middle Eastern sources. If the attitude in Iran spreads to Saudi Arabia or Iraq, the whole structure may break down along with our ability to defend*

[9] Ibid.

> *ourselves. The danger of buying oil produced on a reduced scale has, therefore, potentialities with dangerous repercussions* (qtd. in Abrahamian, 2001: 188).

The British were aware that it was a situation wherein either Iran got full control of oil or not. Mosaddeq as well was fully aware of the situation (189). A communication by the Foreign Office read that ". . . there is the consideration that Parliamentary and public feeling in England would not readily accept a position where we surrender effective control of an asset of this magnitude" (qtd. in Abrahamian, 2001: 189).

In the very first week Mosaddeq was elected Premier, the British government claimed that he was merely riding a "temporary wave" and that concessions would only "buttress" him (Abrahamian, 2001: 189-90). The British Foreign Minister assured Dean Acheson, Truman's Secretary of State, that Mosaddeq would not last long, and that weakening him would not risk a communist takeover in Iran (190).

At first, the British expected Mosaddeq to collapse of his own accord, for all recent governments in Iran had typically lasted only ten months (190). When this did not materialize, they urged the Shah, the Majlis, and the senate to remove him, and when these efforts failed, they tried to destabilize him through economic pressure, propaganda campaigns and subsidies to the opposition. Finally, they resorted to the United States and harnessed the CIA (Abrahamian, 2001: 190).

While waiting for Mosaddeq's fall, the British increased their pressure on Iran by planning a heavy embargo on it, by such means as freezing its sterling assets in London, and preventing the export of equipment for the oil fields in Iran (194). Furthermore, in Washington, they petitioned against aid to Iran. The British went so far as dissuading AIOC workers from working for Iran; and in their effort to make them all give up their jobs, they informed them that their salaries would not be convertible into sterling (194-95). However, despite the British sabotage activities and loss of employees, Iran was able to retain the Abadan refinery along with the major oil wells functioning (Abrahamian, 2001: 195).

To impose further economic obstacles on the Iranian government, Britain convinced other countries not to purchase this oil, and went so far as threatening to sue those who did. It also captured the few tankers that attempted to disrupt the embargo[10]. Indeed, it was not hard to carry out that embargo because most tankers in the world were owned by the main oil companies[11] (195). Iran had therefore to subsist on an "oil-less economy;" besides, it had to stop development plans. Yet despite the embargo, Iran resisted and Mosaddeq remained in power (195).

Communication crisis was also the outcome of the bad intentions of the British who, while waiting for Mosaddeq's fall by an attempt to unseat his government through a Parliament "vote of no confidence,"[12] they pretended that they were ready to agree to "reasonable

[10]Ibid.

[11]In 1951 there were 1500 tankers distributed as follows: 395 American, 214 Norwegian, and 155 Panamanian—almost all owned by the big oil companies. The Soviets and the East Europeans owned 10 of them (Abrahamian 2001, 195).

[12]Katouzian, Homa. *Mosaddeq's Government in Iranian History*. In *Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds.)* (p. 6).

compromise" (Abrahamian, 2001: 190). Yet in reality, they were not honest about looking for a solution to the crisis; one can cite the Harriman Mission (1951) and the Stokes Mission in August as good examples of the manipulation of the situation (190). In the former, Truman sent Averell Harriman as his special representative to help soothe the Stokes-Mosaddeq negotiations; in the latter, one month later, Sir Richard Stokes, the Lord Privy Seal in Clement Attlee's Labour government was sent on a mission to Tehran to conduct negotiations in the name of AIOC and the Labour government (Abrahamian , 2001: 190-91). Added to that, the United Nations, the Hague, and Washington debate in 1951; and finally, the further debate at both the State Department and the World Bank in 1953 (191).

Indeed, Britain had acquired an injunction from the World Court to prevent Iran from repossessing the oil industry[13]. Iran ignored it, on the grounds that since the 1933 agreement had been signed between Iran and a private company (APOC, later AIOC), Iranian courts had exclusively jurisdiction in the issue. This stance was eventually embraced by the World Court (in the Hague) in July 1952[14]. Thereupon, Britain brought the issue to the United Nations Security Council; however, it failed to get its support; at the time Mosaddeq was in the United States in October heading the Iranian delegation to the Security Council.

According to the British press coverage of the oil crisis,Mosaddeq was responsible for the negotiations' failure; nevertheless, secret British memos disclosed a different reality by showing Britain's "bad faith" in the contradiction between its public statements and its private opinions and decisions (191). The British hid their ultimate intentions, namely the overthrow of Mosaddeq. Sir Richard Stokes, the Lord Privy Seal, was sent to Teheran to negotiate on behalf of both the AIOC and the Labour Government (Abrahamian, 2001: 190-91). He observed that Britain should publicly accept nationalization but insist on clauses retaining AIOC control; in private he admitted he would accept the "flavor of façade of nationalization while retaining the substance of control" (191). During the Washington talks, the Foreign Office advanced proposals it was convinced the other party would not accept to subvert a "highly embarrassing" settlement (qtd in Abrahamian, 2001: 191).

In order to strike at the heart of Mosaddeq's regime, the British launched a propaganda campaign that targeted Mosaddeqas well as the National Front. The British published articles in important British and American newspapers. For instance, the *Observer* depicted Premier Mosaddeq as a "fanatic" and a "tragic Frankenstein" with a "gigantic head" and "obsessed with one xenophobic idea" (qtd. in Abrahamian, 2001: 193-94).[15]*Time* portrayed him as a "timid" man who was liable to become dangerously "brave" when "emotionally aroused" by his "martyrdom complex" (193)[16]. To add fuel to the anti-Mosaddeq propaganda, Drew Pearson, one of the most well-known American journalists of his period, contended falsely in the *Washington Post* that Iran's Foreign Minister, HosseinFatemi, had been found guilty on several occasions for corruption.

[13]Katouzian, Homa. *Mosaddeq's Government in Iranian History*. In *Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds.)* (p. 7).

[14] Ibid.
[15](May 10, 1951).
[16](August 22, 1951).

The British assault on the National Front was harsh. Indeed, British officials described it as "nothing but a noisy bunch of malcontents," that Mosaddeq, who was a "wily Oriental," was "wild," "erratic," "eccentric," "crazy," "gangster-like," "fanatical," "absurd," "dictatorial," "demagogic," "inflammatory," and "single-mindedly obstinate" (qtd. in Abrahamian, 2001: 193).

This propaganda further blocked communication between Mosaddeq and his British and American interlocutors since it is hard to diplomatically negotiate with an interlocutor whom one considers as inferior. Stereotypes and prejudicesdominated the British depiction of Iranians as "child-like," "tiresome and headstrong," "unwilling to accept facts," "volatile and unstable," "sentimentally mystical," "unprepared to listen to reason and common sense," and "swayed by emotions devoid of positive content" (193). In a printed document entitled "A Comparison between Persian and Asian Nationalism in General," "Shepherd informed senior officials in the other ministries that Iranian nationalism was not "authentic" and desperately needed a "guiding hand"; the salvation of Persia would be a twenty-year occupation by a foreign Power (rather like the occupation of Haiti by the United States) (194).

In this regard, William Roger Louis observes that "[i]n view of Shepherd's (the British ambassador to Tehran) low opinion of "Oriental character" and of Iran itself as a country of "Oriental decadence," it is hardly surprising that he and Mosaddeq found communication difficult. He impressed upon Mosaddeq , and, it seems, on all other Iranians he met, that Iran had not been allowed to develop "at the hands of a virile and civilized nation" (135-136).[17]This criticism can be interpreted in the context of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" paradigm. The way the British depicted Iranians reveals that the former perceived the latter as inferior to them. They perceived them as people who, instead of relying on reason as Westerners do,they relied on emotions as Easterners do. In reality, the clash originated from the conflict of economic interests that opposed the great powers and their drive for imperialism and control of Middle Eastern resources on the one hand, and Iran, along with its drive for nationalism on the other hand.

To sum up, the "clash of civilizations" can also be seen as the cause of the communication crisis or breakdown that had characterized the U.S./British diplomatic relations with Iran. The communication crisis that characterized the diplomatic relations between Iran and the U.S. and Britain can also be seen at the level of the "clash of interests" between Iran's drive for nationalism that climaxed in Mosaddeq's nationalization of the oil industry on the one hand, and the U.S.'s and Britain's drive for imperialism trying to keep control of the Iranian oil industry to better serve their economic interests.

3. The 1953 *coup* against Mosaddeq

The *coup*, upon which both the Americans and the British concurred, was an intricate, multi-faceted plan that traces its origins back to the oil crisis of 1948-51. As mentioned above, while the British government was presenting its complaint to the Security Council following Mosaddeq's nationalization of Iran's oil industry, it was covertly designing his deposition and getting involved in Iranian political affairs (Katouzian, 2009: 177). This, of course, was preparing the ground for the communication crisis.This was revealed by the minutes written by Robin Zaehner to the Foreign Office of his conversation with Abbas Iskandari in 1951 (177). Zaehner was a professor from Oxford who was assigned to recruit agents that would eventually take part in the *coup*, the most important of whom were the Rashidian brothers (Asadollah,

[17]Gasiorowski and Byrne (2004).

Saifollah and Qodratollah), businessmen with powerful connections in the Tehran Bazaar, the Majlis, and the Palace (De MoraesRuehsen: 474). Kermit Roosevelt, the mastermind of the *coup*, who was the head of CIA operations in the Middle East and the grand-son of the 26th American President, Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), had known the Rashidian brothers for several years. He had arranged for them to be flown to CIA headquarters in Washington for what he called "thorough tests of veracity," and had developed great admiration for their tradecraft (Kinzer: 169-70).

Besides the Rashidians, who were originally British assets, Roosevelt also used several Iranians who had been trained by the CIA (170). The two best, Ali Jalili and Farouk Keyvani, began working for the CIA in early 1951 as organizers of the propaganda and sabotage network known as Operation Bedamn which cost the CIA one million dollars annually (Kinzer: 170; De MoraesRuehsen: 484). Added to the activities cited above, the 1953 coup involved the intrusion of "agents provocateurs" into Tudeh protest marches to incite offensive acts, and organizing assaults on mosques and public figures in the name of the Tudeh (De MoraesRuehsen:484). Finally, there came the turn of the CIA to forge links with the religious elements of the National Front to secure important Iranian allies (Abrahamian, 2001: 202). The Americans, willingly ready to step in as a major actor in the coup, offered the American embassy compound to launch the plan.

"Operation Ajax" included three agencies: the CIA, State, and Defense. In order for the *coup* to be successful, the Iranian army would have to be in the camp of the coup plotters (De MoraesRuehsen: 476). A special expert was sent to Tehran for the purpose of dealing with this issue.He was depicted as "a CIA paramilitary" expert "with recent experience in Korea" (476). Another crucial figure in the *coup* was brigadier General Robert Maclure, whom the French military *attaché* in Tehran depicted as a specialist in psychological warfare who worked in that division of Eisenhower's staff during the War and had served in Korea (476). According to Abrahamian (2001: 467),

> *[i]t is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a historian to gain access to the CIA archives on the 1953 coup in Iran" (182). De MoraesRuehsen agrees that different elements of the CIA plot are still "clouded in mystery" (467). She observes that "given the sensitive nature of the operation and shaky US relations with Iran over the last ten years, much of the material in government hands has been withheld."*

By investigating the motives of the *coup*, the way it was planned, the intrigues and secrecy surrounding it, the spying and manipulation of people, the distortion of events, and the human casualties and the social and political repercussions on the future of Iran, one can but confirm the extent to which the United States and Great Britain were involved in the overthrow of Mosaddeq. The great technical and material costs of the *coup* demonstrate that domestic actors alone could have never achieved the success of such a historical conspiracy. In addition to that, the *coup* disclosed the foreign policy debacles of the United States and Great Britain, and attested to the questionable means they used, such as using the Shah as a puppet against Mosaddeq, by forcing him to issue the firman (decree) against him.

The scheme of Operation Ajax, which Kinzer described as "a cooperative venture involving all the above-mentioned parties," projected a deep psychological campaign against Premier Mossadeq, a campaign that the CIA had already launched, followed by a declaration that the Shah had fired him (6). Gangs and military divisions whose leaders were on the CIA payroll would crush any attempt by Mosaddeq to resist. Then it would be pronounced that the Shah had selected General FazlollahZahedi, a retired military officer who had received more than 100,000 dollars from the CIA, as the country's new Prime Minister (6). In Kermit Roosevelt's conversation with the Shah in order to convince him to take part in the plot, Roosevelt said he had around one million dollars, as well as very proficient agents who could hand out tracts, bring together mobs, and deal with the opposition (Kinzer: 10). In Roosevelt's description of "Operation Ajax," he notes that it consists of "four lines of attack (10). First, a propaganda against Mosaddeq in mosques, the press, and the streets would damage his reputation. Second, royalist military brigadiers would carry the decree firing him; third, crowds would take over the streets; fourth, General Zahedi would arise triumphantly and assent to the Shah's appointment as Prime Minister (10). The August 15 attempted coup failed, but Roosevelt had still hope in its eventual success which took place on August 19, 1953.

Whether a Cold War card to play or the consequence of other factors, the repercussions of the coup impacted the political history of Iran forever. The political landscape in Iran would have been completely different if Mosaddeq had not been unseated. The coup similarly altered the U.S.-Iran diplomatic relations and accounts for the distrust that continues to plague that relationship until today.

Byrne points out that the repercussions of the coup were experienced at different levels (Gasiorowski & Byrne: 218). At the domestic level, it put an end to a lively phase in the history of Iran's nationalist and democratic movements. In Heiss'sview, the nationalization crisis played a seminal role in determining future events not only in Iran but also all over the Middle East; it opened the way to a twenty-five-year old friendship between the United States and the Shah, who became, after the mid-1950s the main ally of the United States in the Middle East (5). Sheobserves that this played its part in the anti-Western feelings that exploded in the late 1970s (which can also be viewed as part of communication problem) in Iran, pushing the Shah into exile and giving way to the Islamic Revolution. The leaders of the 1950s nationalization and those of the revolution during the 1970s differed in many ways; nevertheless, they had a common objective: freeing their country of foreign influence (5). Indeed, the slogans shouted in Tehran in 1978 and 1979: "Remember Mosaddeq" and "Down with the American Shah" illustrate the "direct link" between the 1950s movement for oil nationalization and the revolutionary movement of the late 1970s (5).

The *coup* and its consequences impacted upon U.S. policies and status in Iran. The U.S. superseded Britain as the major foreign power in the country. "This was a two-edged sword," since, given its participation in the coup, many Iranians viewed the U.S. with much suspicion as the Shah's greatest ally (qtd. in Gasiorowski & Byrne: xv). Therefore, with the emergence of the revolutionary Islamic regime in 1979, animosity toward the Shah similarly targeted the U.S. Kinzer (2008) went so far as to point out that "it is not far-fetched to draw a line from Operation Ajax through the Shah's repressive regime and the Islamic Revolution to the fireballs that engulfed the World Trade Center in New York (203-04).

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to cover the Iranian oil nationalization crisis in the 1950s with special emphasis on the diplomatic relations between Iran and Britain, on the one hand, and Iran and the U.S. on the other hand. At the heart of the problem lies the communication crisis that eventually led to the CIA orchestrated coup against Mosaddeq, thus putting an end to all hopes of communication success between Iran and the West.

The paper has been divided into two main sections: section one dealt with Mosaddeq's nationalization of the oil industry and the diplomatic crisis it created between Iran and Britain and the U.S. The second section shed light on the climax of the communication crisis between Iran and the West, namely the overthrow of Mosaddeq by *a coup d'état* that put an end to all diplomatic ties between Iran and the U.S. and that has marked the history of the two countries' diplomacy ever since.

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