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The Southern Flank: Successes and Failures of Eisenhower Administration Anti-Communist Policy in Iraq and Iran

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THE SOUTHERN FLANK: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF
EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION ANTI-COMMUNIST
POLICY IN IRAQ AND IRAN

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

This is an examination of the Eisenhower Administration's diplomatic and broader foreign policy in Iran and Iraq. The geopolitical circumstances of the early Cold War period framed the decisions of the Eisenhower Administration in every geographical region. In the Middle East the Eisenhower Administration attempted to check Soviet influence and potential expansionism as well as moderate or sideline Gamal Abdul Nasser's Arab Socialist and Arab Nationalist movements.

In furtherance of these goals, the Eisenhower Administration took two very different approaches to the regimes in Iraq and Iran. After a reasonably fair election in Iran returned an anti-Monarchist government that had some socialist elements more sympathetic to the USSR and that government took steps to nationalize the oil industry, the Eisenhower administration authorized a CIA-backed coup plot that reinstated the shah and removed the left-leaning government. Thereafter the Eisenhower Administration sought to prop up the government with military aid and economic development.

In Iraq a reasonably friendly monarchy and political oligarchy's concerns and fundamental weaknesses were essentially ignored in the run up to a major coup in 1958. Despite being driven by nationalist concerns, the new governments all had a slight socialist element, and thus the Eisenhower Administration was cold to the overtures of friendship.

This paper argues that these strategic choices were knowably short-sighted and narrow-focused, and they were important causes of the following Islamic Revolution in

1979 in Iran and the Baath government taking control in Iraq in 1968. The Eisenhower Administration confused Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism with Soviet communism and issued ultimatums that neither government would be able to reasonably fulfilled if they desired to survive in the long term.

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I would also like to thank the staff at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, KS for their assistance finding appropriate documents and their courtesy. They should also be commended for their level of commitment to outreach. The research process can be intimidating and frustrating, but having been exposed to their archives and research procedures during High School reduced the stress and allowed me to make optimal use of my time.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

For documents archived at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, KS this work uses a modified form of their recommended notation procedures. Specific documents and cables from the State Department or National Security Agency (NSA) or personal memos seldom have official titles, so the leading text or header of the document or the recipient and author of letters and memos are used in lieu of titles where needed. Also, in most cases Box numbers and collections are sufficient, given the titles or headers, for finding documents. Where they are not folder numbers are provided.

This thesis depends heavily on diplomatic, NSA, and official Presidential correspondence. Because of this, some perspectives are by nature not referenced, including those of the Department of Defense, or if they are, are filtered through other agencies. This is both an unavoidable simplification and a reasonable measure, as diplomacy was the main avenue for American power in the Middle East at that time.

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INTRODUCTION

Among all the political controversy over the actions of the United States in the Middle East over the past decade, context can sometimes be hard to come by. As of this writing, the Islamic regime in Iran and its presumed nuclear weapons program, the aftermath of the American-led coalition's exit from Iraq after almost a decade, the debate over how quickly the West should remove military resources from Afghanistan, and the consequences of the Arab Spring consume hours on mainstream cable broadcasts, and the reports are written as if they are discreet, independent phenomena. At some level they no doubt are. However, hard as it is to write about the complexities of the Middle East, it is much less difficult than developing military, economic, and diplomatic policy to execute on the consistent basis that the United States and Europe have for the past several decades.

It is a historian's job to provide the context that makes some of those current value judgments easier. Any history of any long-standing culture or region will no doubt have its share of limitations, many of them imposed by the constraints of time and relevance. However, a well-written account of the interactions between various nations, religions, ethnic groupings, governments, and economic interests, no matter how narrow, should provide distinctive insight into present challenges and possible courses of action. It should also broaden appreciation of the culture and the facts as they are unto themselves. This thesis intends to do just that by illustrating the difficulty of predicting and controlling political movements in the broader Middle East.

It may be a broad overgeneralization to claim that any one specific group of events was the most important factor in the current state of affairs in the Middle East, but

at some level it is necessary. As the major powers negotiated a settlement after World War II, the Iron Curtain fell over Eastern Europe, decolonization spread as European governments relinquished control over protectorates and colonies, and the perpetual standoff we call the Cold War started, it was not clear what area of the world would be the most strategically important or difficult. President Truman's police action in Korea seemed to indicate that the Far East would be the point of heaviest contention between the United States and the Soviet Union, and broadly speaking that would have been a correct conclusion to draw. However, in the Middle East, as in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Europe, important changes were taking place. New governments and old were strategizing to take the most advantage of this newly tense situation, new leaders were expounding upon a vision for Arab Unity and Nonalignment with both major powers, nascent communist parties were settling in for a long struggle to bring the revolution home, and old religious rivalries which had been subdued by anticolonial unity were starting to reemerge.

Iraq's and Iran's experiences in this period were broadly indicative of these greater tides. In both Arab unity was an important point of discussion, though for very different reasons. Both were headed by near-absolute monarchies tied to ostensibly democratic political systems led by a small cadre of elites, and thus uniquely vulnerable to Communist propaganda. Both were close allies of the west in very close geographic contact with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union). Both had been dominated before and during World War II by Great Britain, leading to a close bond between their leadership and the UK but an antipathy toward the broader West and

especially the UK by their citizens. In both cases, as the British wound down their empire, the United States took over this important influential role and acted to preserve British economic and political interests starting in the early 1950's. Finally, much like Korea and Vietnam, the American government viewed Iran and Iraq as crucial first steps for Soviet expansion in a vital region. For all these reasons, despite the relative lack of public awareness, American involvement in Iraq and Iran during this decade was almost as extensive as involvement in East Asia or Western Europe.

All of these conflicts and opportunities took root in a broader regional realignment. After World War II France and Great Britain quickly removed themselves from the Middle Eastern mandatory territories that had been put under their protection by the League of Nations after World War I. For Palestine/Israel, Syria, and Jordan this meant the effective end of political colonialism. However, for Iraq the reality was distinctly different. Great Britain had removed itself from its Iraqi mandate gradually starting in the late 1920s only to reinsert itself directly during World War II when the then Regent and the government seemed likely to side with Germany in the war. Thus for the new Iraqi government the question of whether Britain or her allies would use force to obtain policies better suited to their needs had already been answered in resounding fashion. For a region that provoked relatively little concern in the political classes of the Western powers, Iraq was perhaps the most difficult nation to make sense of. No one was predicting a communist takeover, but Iraq's government would need careful monitoring.

Directly to the east of Iraq, Iran (formerly Persia) had maintained some semblance of independence during the colonial era, unlike essentially all of its neighbors. The relatively new Pahlavi dynasty of shahs and the other governing systems of Iran were mostly well-maintained and formally were rooted in Western ideas. Alone among the states in the Middle East Iran openly supported the formation of the new state of Israel brokered by the western powers. It was becoming clear that in the medium to long term oil would be a significantly improved source of revenue and Western powers hoped the prosperity brought by such abundant reserves would allow Iran to invest both in protecting itself from the looming Soviet threat and to better the economic standing of its people enough to make native-grown communism less likely to pose a threat. If there was one country in the region that Western powers did not believe they would have to invest particularly heavily in during the next couple of decades, it was Iran.

From these promising if shaky beginnings the stories of Western, and particularly American and British, involvement in Iraq and Iran took similar turns. During the late Truman and the Eisenhower administrations the United States government and to a lesser extent the British took direct actions in both nations that fostered popular ill will in the name of maintaining friendly regimes. The CIA plot to overthrow the first and still only openly democratically elected prime minister of Iran Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953 because of his willingness to include the sizable communist party block in his center-left government and of fears that the land reform desperately needed in the countryside would develop into communist-style collective farming and nationalizations permanently damaged the image of the United States in Iran. It also set in motion the events that

placed the shah back into full dictatorial power. Over the next decade, the shah's paranoia would become the greatest challenge to American-Iranian relations and to his own regime. Over time the shah's regime became less and less stable, largely because of his policies favoring westernization without democratization.

Although it is perhaps unremarkable that the United States took these actions, most of them had unforeseen consequences, the most obvious of which was the eventual rise of hostile regimes in both Iraq and Iran and increased religious radicalization. This then has to be compared with the relative levels of religious animosity and extremism before these actions were taken, weighted against the benefits and perhaps losses to the United States and the world at large procured by the proactive prevention of the spread of communism in the region, and analyzed in light of what information the Eisenhower Administration and the British Government had or should have had access to about the consequences of this involvement. In the cases of both Iraq and Iran, there is ample declassified documentation to provide a clear view of what the Eisenhower Administration knew about both the shah's regime and the Iraqi monarchy. It is then possible to trace the deliberations over policy and evaluate what each policy or individual act taken with regard to both nations resulted in. That is precisely the goal of this thesis.

At this point certain methodological points and concessions must be made. Maximum effort was expended to limit the scope of this paper to the policies of the Eisenhower Administration. This is important both because of practical constraints and because the Truman and Kennedy/Johnson Administrations took some similar, but also significantly different, actions and implemented policies sometimes at odds with and

other times, in the case of Kennedy/Johnson, building upon the Eisenhower Administration's principles and policies. This also helps isolate the exact effects of precise policy decisions and actions from broader antipathy toward the US and the rest of the West in the region. This specific consideration also limits the temporal and thematic overlap with significant scholarship in the historiography of Iraq dealing with the consequences of and US responses to the coup of 1958.

Iraq and Iran have been specifically selected, as mentioned previously, both for their unique shared position as places of maximum American and British investment of time and resources in the region, the unpopularity and fundamental instability of the regimes, and because the sustained involvement is largely limited to Great Britain, whose influence was gradually waning, and the United States, which was attempting to step in and secure these two nations against Soviet expansion. Because of this, ample documentation exists of policy deliberations between the US and Britain as well as Iraq and Iran's governments. Both also had well organized, activist, engaged, and reasonably respected communist parties. Though both were small in pure numbers, both had distinct leverage with the central governments before 1952.

Upon examining the evidence, it is clear that the Eisenhower Administration's policies in Iraq and Iran had two clear geopolitical effects: the destruction or marginalization of the communist movements in Iraq and Iran and the religious and political radicalization that would eventually be the direct cause of the 1958 coup in Iraq, the Baath 1968 victory there, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. Although it might have been possible to prevent the a communist takeover without triggering

religious radicalism, and despite the fact that at least the Iraqi regime was likely to eventually fall anyway, the Eisenhower administration exercised relatively little concern over this matter at the time. The single-issue focus of the Eisenhower administration was effective at preventing the spread of communism south into the Middle East, but it was also recklessly responsible for a major part of the religious and political radicalization of the Middle East.

This can be documented in a fairly straightforward fashion. This paper comprises into three main sections. The first is in essence an examination of Iraq, the second of Iran, and the third a synthesis of similarities and differences. Both of the first two sections will begin with an outline of the stability of the regime and the economic, religious, and political realities in the country in question. Second, the nascent Communist movement in both nations is examined. Both of these sections are relatively minimalist, secondary-source driven, and geared toward providing context. The final and major portion of each of the first two sections will be an examination of American and to a lesser extent British actions in the host country as well as policy deliberations where appropriate. This portion relies heavily on primary sources, although it utilizes corroboration from secondary sources. This thesis continues with a brief examination of the complications in formulating a coherent foreign policy in the region by President Gamel Abdul Nasser of Egypt and his call for Pan-Arab Socialism, and subsequently, a small section will document the post-1958 hostility between Iraq and Iran and address the most obvious counter-argument to the one made in this thesis, namely that the Iraqi and Iranian governments' mutual hostility was as much if not more to blame for the

radicalization in question. The conclusion of this thesis will analyze these actions comparatively, highlight points of similarity and difference, and attempt to track the effects of American and in some cases British policy actions during this time period in some cases into the late 1960s or early 1970s to provide maximum evidence of the effects in the shortest possible account.

Hopefully, this examination of the facts regarding American actions in the Middle East will be somewhat useful in patching a gaping hole in the history of the Cold War, understanding the origins of modern Islamic radicalism, and demonstrating the dangers and opportunities that existed in the region and to some extent still do exist. To the extent that history is the collective story of humanity, humanity has overlooked or glossed this chapter over far too long. Perhaps examining its intricacies will prove useful in planning better forms of interaction with the Middle East, help prevent similar mishaps in the future, and increase the appreciation of the difficulties faced by all governments at the beginning of the Cold War.

CHAPTER ONE: IRAQ: FROM FRAGILE ALLY TO REVOLUTIONARY CHAOS

With all the focus on Iraq as a point of United States policy and military intervention in the last decade, it is sometimes easy to get lost in the complexity of the underlying society. Iraq has long been among the most ethnically and religiously divided of the regions of the Middle East. The Kurds in the North, Sunni Arabs in the West and around Baghdad, Shiite Arabs in the broader south, and a number of smaller ethnic groups spread across the nation have at times acted as one cohesive unit against external powers and at others have divided and fought amongst themselves. However, unlike some other unstable areas in Central Asia and the Middle East, Iraq has never been ungovernable. Loose coalitions have always been viable and had changed under pressure in sometimes verifiably unique ways.

Iraqi Background Politics from 1914 to 1954

This underlying political setting made Iraq an unusually easy Mandate for the British to govern in the interwar period. The bureaucratic structures of the Iraqi state that existed until the fall of Saddam Hussein existed prior to British rule, when Iraq was a titular part of the Ottoman Empire. Its base military force and traditions also dated back to Ottoman times. The British had originally not intended to annex Iraq at all, but felt compelled to take Basra and the south during the war due to the Empire's decision to side with the Central Powers.¹ Between 1914 and 1916 the British made a series of secret agreements with the French and tribal leaders in the Arabian Peninsula that gave Britain

¹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2004), 29, 30.

the authority to establish postwar governments in the areas around Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad.²

Between 1922 and 1924 Britain negotiated the borders of what would become Iraq with the sovereign neighbors of the new state and the French on behalf of their protectorates in Transjordan and Syria.³ The British followed their typical pattern during colonization, making pacts with local tribal leaders and attempting at the same time to establish a significant if somewhat limited central authority. Allying themselves with regional and tribal leaders would be pivotal in disenfranchising the intelligentsia in the more urban areas that had been fostered and preferred by the Ottoman administration, and these decisions would have significant impact on the course of intellectual thought over the next few decades. The British administration imported the Hashemite monarchy from Syria where their regime had collapsed during the immediate postwar years. King Faisal I went from being King of Damascus to King of Iraq in five years.⁴ They also formalized the new Iraqi army from the remnants of Ottoman forces and pro-monarchist sympathizers.

In 1932 the League of Nations dissolved the British mandate in Iraq, the only such mandate to be dissolved before World War II. The intermediate period between the end of the Mandate and the establishment of the regime that would fall in 1958 was characterized by a mixture of short-term government, internal intrigue, and continued

² Marr, 31.

³ Michael Eppel. *Iraq from Monarchy to Tyranny: From the Hashemites to the Rise of Saddam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 13, 14.

⁴ Eppel, 14-16.

British meddling. The urban nationalists who had been marginalized during the mandate period in favor of tribal leaders reasserted their rights, culminating in extensive violence against the ethnic minorities who had constituted the bulk of the British-controlled military and police forces during the mandate period, especially ethnic Assyrians.⁵ King Faisal died in 1933. His son Ghazi succeeded him, and was a favorite of the military, nationalists, and the young intelligentsia who had begun to replace the old Ottoman scholarly classes. Ghazi's reign was short (he died in 1939), and his own missteps and controversies with the British and the old Ottoman politicians consumed most of his efforts.⁶ The policies implemented under Ghazi angered tribal leaders by placing more and more authority in the central bureaucracy and educated townspeople.⁷ The military forcefully put down the ensuing riots, and this led to further political radicalization along nationalist lines, culminating with in a decree by King Ghazi declaring Iraq's right to annex Kuwait.⁸

When King Ghazi died in 1939 and his son Faisal II became king, the official account of Ghazi's death as a result of a drunk driving accident was widely questioned by the nationalist leaders, many of whom suspected the relatively new government's tribal elements and its leader Nuri al-Said.⁹ The resulting instability left a young king, an

⁵ Marr, 57-8.

⁶ Marr, 60.

⁷ Marr, 61.

⁸ Eppel, 44.

⁹ Eppel, 45.

unpopular government, a questionable regent in the new king's maternal uncle Abd Allah, and a nationalist public growing sympathetic to any system or argument that would elevate the power and prestige of Iraq against its increasingly unpopular British protectors in constant conflict with each other. The intricacies and complex relationships that were pivotal in determining Eisenhower Administration policy from 1952-1958 were based largely on the politics surrounding this situation. King Faisal II would not become responsible for his own rule until 1953 after his eighteenth birthday, and at that time would name his uncle his principal advisor and Crown Prince.¹⁰

Immediately following Faisal II's enthronement, Iraq held its only reasonably open and democratic election before the American invasion of 2003.¹¹ The parliaments of the previous decade had been controlled by army strongmen and frequently overthrown. Only Nuri had been able to establish a stable central government, although with severe electoral controls. The results of the election secured a handful of seats for at least ostensibly social-democratic parties in the emerging European mold and at least one independent elected on a distinctly communist platform.¹² Despite the clear majority which would have been held if Nuri's and the Crown Prince's hand-picked legislators had banded together, Nuri refused leadership if any of the leftists elected were allowed in the parliament. British and French leaders were concerned that the expiration of the set

¹⁰ Marr, 115.

¹¹ Marr, 114.

¹² Marr, 115.

of treaties that had solidified the post-war Middle East would expire in three years, and the only leader they trusted to handle the negotiations was Nuri. This led to a hasty reshuffling of the cabinet, the dissolution of parliament, and a rigged election that returned no opposition members to parliament.¹³ The resulting series of treaties would cause a number of domestic problems for most of the major states in the region, but these problems were nearly unique to Iraq due to its desire to maintain a pro-Western and pro-Iranian stance while maintaining fidelity with other Arab states. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter 3. It will suffice for now to say that the cornerstone agreement, the Baghdad Pact, signed by Turkey, Iraq, and Britain and later joined by Pakistan and supported by Iran and the United States, was expected to provide a uniform pro-Western, anti-Communist bulwark against southward Soviet expansion.¹⁴

The problem with such a treaty was that objections could be expected from Iraq's Arab neighbors to any alliance with non-Arab nations. True to this expectation, the preliminary discussions provoked a hostile response from Nasser in Egypt. At an Arab League meeting in Cairo the Egyptian delegate denounced Arab involvement in the "Turko-Pakistani Alliance" and called on all nations involved to repudiate any involvement in such an alliance. Caught off guard, the Iraqi delegate swore that all rumors of Iraqi involvement were false.¹⁵ Because of this, Nuri asked the United States to

¹³ Marr, 115-116.

¹⁴ Eppel, 134-138.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-54*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office), Keefer, Edward C. and Glenn W. Lafantasia eds., 9, 2375, April 8, 1954.

intervene with Nasser, and the dispute was temporarily shelved.¹⁶ The original Baghdad Pact involved only Turkey, Iraq and the United Kingdom. This was a mixed blessing for the Iraqi regime. Relations with Turkey had always been strong, and any involvement by the UK would carry risks and rewards similar to direct US involvement for Iraq given the public disgust with the British. However, the United States was concerned that its direct involvement would make claims that the pact was forced on Turkey and Iraq by the West more credible.¹⁷ The Iraqi government would have preferred a broader agreement including both the US and other Arab countries, and the lack of US involvement removed some much needed domestic political cover.¹⁸ On March 16, 1955 the American embassy in Iraq endorsed US adherence to the pact for those reasons.¹⁹ Pakistan promised to sign on at the initial signing, but the US refused to sign when the treaty was ratified because of Iraqi insistence that the pact be open to other Arab members and not just the Northern Tier of countries (Iran and Pakistan). The US left open the possibility of ratifying at the first five-year renewal period and promised more aid via NATO and SEATO to this new alliance.²⁰

¹⁶ U. S Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-7*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office), Keefer, Edward C. and Glenn W. Lafantasia eds., 12, 7, January 17, 1955,

¹⁷ Foreign Relations 1955-7, February 15, 1955, Volume 12, 19.

¹⁸ Foreign Relations 1955-7, February 3, 1955, Volume 12, 11.

¹⁹ Foreign Relations 1955-7, March 16, 1955, Volume 12, 35.

²⁰ Foreign Relations 1955-7, January 17, 1955, Volume 12, 133.

The Baghdad Pact and the politics required to reach it effected two significant changes to the situation the Iraqi regime faced. Externally it opened up channels to aid and support from other Western countries that had previously come only from Great Britain. Given Britain's expressed desire to lessen its footprint in Iraq this all but obligated the United States to step in and take a more active role. This accelerated the secondary, internal dynamic: the consolidation of political power in the hands of Nuri and the Crown Prince and the elimination of any political dissent. Hopes for oil revenue to boost the urban economies without infringing on the rights of tribal leaders and increasing military aid enabled the Iraqi regime to stifle all dissent. Joining any of the left-wing political parties or social organizations could result in the forfeiture of Iraqi citizenship and deportation, and a number of Iraqi leftists were summarily stripped of their citizenship and deported to Soviet-bloc states. This internal repression was coupled with the revocation of relations with the USSR.²¹ Taken together these actions laid the groundwork for a leftist-communist-nationalist-military uprising in 1958 that would overthrow the regime.

The Birth and Development of the Iraqi Communist Party from 1936 to 1952

Unlike many of the areas that would later become major flashpoints in Cold War relations, Iraq had relatively few western-educated leaders who sympathized with communism or were openly Communist. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was largely

²¹ Marr, 115-116.

dead in 1936.²² The original party founded in 1921 had been among the most well-organized of the period, but still could not survive the end of the mandate. This was in part due to the dearth of all political organizations of an official type around this time and in part due to the native reluctance of the Iraqi people and culture to embrace any type of new idea or system, including a more modern, western style of governance. One major author on the subject of Iraqi communism characterized the contemporary Iraqis in the following manner: “It was doubtful if one educated Iraqi in a hundred would have conceived society on purely democratic lines or, given power, would have wished so to organize it. By his nature, an Iraqi was individualistic and insubordinate; by his tradition he was authoritarian, while the conditions of the society were inimical to democracy.”²³

However, the level of the structural collapse of the Iraqi Communist Party is in dispute. In the 1936 general election following the first military coup led by longtime Iraqi/Ottoman military officer Bakr Sidiq and supported by King Ghazi, two people aligned with the Iraqi Communist Party won seats in Parliament and the left-leaning urban populations were key to its coalition.²⁴ However, the military backers of the regime were afraid of the Communist party and its aims, and Bakr moved quickly to quash the ICP. His assassination in 1937 led to the first large-scale repression of ICP

²² Tareq Y Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Ira*. (Cambridge: New York, 2008), 24.

²³ Rony Gabbay, *Communism and Agrarian Reform in Iraq* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 47.

²⁴ Johan Ranz n, *Red Star Over Iraq: Iraqi Communism Before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press), 36, 37.

members.²⁵ Between 1937 and 1938 the ICP was banned and senior leaders faced the death penalty. However, this type of repression resulted in a more resilient underground movement and functionally resurrected a faltering movement.²⁶ This would be a recurring problem: Iraq would actually move to enforce its longstanding ban on communism in response to some crisis or outside pressure, the movement would go underground, it would recruit among the few groups to whom it could appeal (mainly students, mid-level military officers, and the small middle class), and it would be officially tolerated with a new leftist government or due to some international change. This cycle would repeat during and after World War II and again before the revolution in 1958.

This first period of repression ended in 1941 during World War II. Iraq was bound by the treaty with Great Britain to declare war on Germany, Italy and Japan. Entering the war on the side of the British was not popular with the nationalist politicians and citizens who had been supported by King Ghazi, and the Crown Prince and his allies were all too aware that he needed as many allies as possible. After the USSR entered the war and released all the international parties to side with the allies, the Crown Prince and several successive prime ministers decided to relax slowly restrictions on communist activity. This fed into a positive feedback loop that was already taking shape: the nationalists were becoming enamored with the USSR and communist ideology as

²⁵ Franzen, 37.

²⁶ Gabbay, 52.

implemented there. They saw the economic system as being more nationalist than that under the monarchy, wanted the opportunity to break completely out of Britain's orbit, and saw useful parallels to other ideas emerging in the Arab world that would later be consolidated into Nasser's Arab Socialism. As it was, the Crown Prince needed both his traditional conservative support and that of the leftists in Iraq, because for the duration of the war the nationalists would be in opposition to the government and the ensuing British occupation.²⁷

The Crown Prince's decisions were facilitated by the fact that the ICP both became more centralized during this period and proceeded down the international track he had to follow more closely than any other significant political group. The Crown Prince had quietly supported a military coup in 1941, and the new government withdrew from the war, declared neutrality, and started negotiating with Germany. This was extremely popular with the public at large, and the British promptly invaded and occupied all the major cities of Iraq. The Communists were the only group who had supported this coup on conditional terms, so they quickly denounced it, supported the Soviet Union and Britain in their united opposition to Germany, and organized Iraqis supportive of the war effort.²⁸

Having never fully reorganized after the breakup in 1936, the small sympathetic splinter groups came together in 1944, and under the leadership of the director of the ICP, Yusef Salman Yusef Fahd, a new merger took place. The new ICP took a position

²⁷ Gabbay, 53-4.

²⁸ Gabbay 53, 54 and Ismael, 27.

similar to many developing nations' communist parties: they forcefully argued for nationalist and democratic goals in the short term, land reform in the medium term, and labor reform, the right to unionize, gender equality, and the gradual transition to communism through whatever means that might come most naturally in the long-term. The ICP also hoped to take advantage of the rising Arab nationalist tide by including language condemning Zionism and calling for cooperation with all other Arab political parties and for full sovereignty. This addressed the demands of the more nationalist-leaning leftist thinkers and allowed a reconsolidation of the party's position as the main organization on the Iraqi left, small though it was, and posed a direct challenge to the more conservative and purely nationalist forces.²⁹

With the outbreak of the Cold War, the Communist Party again became a force in opposition to the monarchy. Bolstered by an economic crash at the end of the war, the ICP organized a major series of strikes denouncing the British and calling for economic reforms.³⁰ The resulting movement toward economic reform and liberalization by the regime did not quiet the protests, and so the government returned to its previous policy of criminalization and imprisonment. All the members of the Politburo were arrested in a matter of months, and the ensuing two-year trial resulted in terms of imprisonment from fifteen years to life for a large number of senior members. Fahd was initially sentenced to death, but the British found such an execution both unreasonable and a potential

²⁹ Ismael, 32, 33.

³⁰ Gabbay, 56.

catalyst for protests back home, and persuaded the Crown Prince to commute his sentence to life imprisonment.³¹

The ICP responded by again going under the radar, recruiting students and more mid-level military officers, and agitating for economic reform through third-party organizations run by more mainstream leftist and populist politicians.³² Again, the ICP grew in relative power and influence far quicker when outlawed than when out in the open competing with other reformist platforms and parties. Over the next five years the government implemented reforms unevenly, and the changes failed as a result. With the advent of the final Nuri regime and the ascension of Faisal II, the ICP prepared to make yet another comeback.

First, though, the ICP had to endure a major policy split. There were two major camps that emerged from the leadership crises caused by a series of arrests initiated by Nuri in 1953, both of which fueled the growth of the ICP in different communities. The more radical wing made a home for itself in the international communist community. Karim al-Daud, the leader of this faction and leader of the ICP after this spate of arrests, was a decent theorist and poor organizer. He devoted his attention to gaining the recognition of other communist parties and procuring membership in international communist party conferences. His first significant victory in this realm was an invitation by the British Communist Party to attend a series of meetings in London of the various Communist Parties in those areas once dominated by British Imperial rule. He also

³¹ Franzen, 53.

³² Franzen, 55.

developed an unusual level of collaboration with the Lebanese and Syrian communist parties. Having been chosen by his peers in the ICP, Daud started a tradition of senior Kurdish leadership in the ICP. All previous Kurdish senior leaders in the ICP had succeeded other leaders who had been arrested or killed in a temporary capacity.³³

Daud also was not afraid to delegate more traditional organizational tasks to both moderate and radical leaders within the party. The more moderate wing in the party eventually convinced party leadership to side with nationalist forces in the opposition, to support Kurdish self-determination, and to recast the ICP as a permanently nationalist organization.³⁴ This proved convenient and helpful in the medium term, as the united focus on building Iraq as a nation, as well as Arab cooperation and mutual hostility to the conservative regime of Nuri, would prevent the other opposition parties from mobilizing against the Communists' international and economic agendas until well after the fall of the Nuri regime.

Relations of the United States and Britain with the Monarchy 1952-1958

Iraq spent the last half of the 1940s seeking greater trade partnerships with the US and other non-British Western powers, but largely evaluated the question of Soviet attack or political aggression as both unfeasible and generally futile. Combined with broad anti-Western sentiment created by the British occupation during the war, this foreclosed any real cooperation with the US during the majority of the Truman administration. This reticence started to dissolve after the Chinese/North Korean invasion of South Korea.

³³ Ismael, 29, 30.

³⁴ Franzen, 65, 66.

The US Ambassador to Baghdad Burton Berry had left in late September 1950 and returned on January 23, 1951 to a completely different reception. Prime Minister Nuri and acting foreign minister Shakr al-Wadi were proposing a pan-Arab military alliance against the Soviet Union, and this caught the ambassador off guard.³⁵ The ambassador believed that this alliance was a ploy to dramatize the need for a pro-Western stance more broadly, and was pleased that Nuri had made a decision to side with the West. By August the United States offered military and economic assistance to Iraq and Iraq accepted.³⁶ The Pentagon advised technical assistance in November and implemented it gradually thereafter.³⁷ The Eisenhower Administration continued this piecemeal approach over its first several years, gradually granting more aid in a variety of ways and offering more international support in a fashion calculated to cause the least protest by nationalist forces in Iraq.

On a broader scale, the Iraqi government was not always easy to deal with. Iraq was enthusiastic about growing ties with the United States, but repeatedly made it clear that perceived favoritism of other nations in the region would not be tolerated. Discussions of a more sturdy military alliance in the region and with the US started as early as August 1952 with the newly appointed Foreign Minister Fadhil Jamali making the case that Iraq was the most stable of the Near Eastern countries with which the US

³⁵ U. S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office) Keefer, Edward C. and Glenn W. Lafantasia eds., 5, 545, January 24, 1951.

³⁶ Foreign Relations 1951, 5, 551, August 28, 1951.

³⁷ Foreign Relations 1951, 5, 554, November 10, 1951.

had amicable relations and thus the logical focal point for regional defense and economic strategies.³⁸ The Iraqi government continued to be concerned about the lack of mutual military assistance treaties in the region and its own limited resources to provide weapons and munitions for a growing military. The US gradually took the role as main supplier of arms and munitions to the Iraqi government from the British government in the run-up to Baghdad Pact negotiations. As early as March 1953 the Iraqi government openly expressed concern over its ability to supply four full divisions without undermining the economic development and oil exploitation programs that it hoped would keep the regime internally stable.³⁹

The principal US objective in Iraq from 1954 onward was continued viability of the Baghdad Pact and the Arab League. The historical fears of Iran about Iraq because of its restless Shiite majority and Kurdish problems gradually began to dissipate as Iraq contained the threats these could pose to Iran with its significant Kurdish population and Shiite majority. The relations between Iraq and its other Baghdad Pact allies gradually became stronger. However, both pan-Arab sentiment in Iraq proper and its political challenges and by the regular condemnations of the alliance by the Arab League served as a counterpoint to these non-Arab alliances. Although the Iraqi government under Nuri never reconsidered or questioned the wisdom of the Baghdad Pact, the resulting hostile relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia created persistent concern over the possibility of

³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952-54* (Washington, D.C.: U.S Government Printing Office), Keefer, Edward C. and Glenn W. Lafantasic eds., 9, 2333-2334, August 12, 1952,.

³⁹ Foreign Relations 1952-54, 9, 2344-2346, March 22, 1953,.

internal nationalist intrigue and the isolation of the Iraqi regime from other Arab governments.⁴⁰

In 1956, the Eisenhower administration reached the conclusion that the Baghdad Pact would effectively last only as long as Nuri's premiership, unless more military and civilian aid could be funneled to Iraq under the Baghdad Pact or another Arab nation could be convinced to join the pact. There was some sense of urgency due to this dynamic, although the pressure by Egypt was seen as consolidating intra-governmental support behind a Nuri premiership for the foreseeable future. The assessment of the state department was that the greatest threat to Nuri and the rest of the Iraqi regime in the short term was either a destabilization of Syria or an overthrow of the monarchy in Jordan.⁴¹ Any threat to the long-term stability of the regime was believed to require the death or incapacitation of Nuri without a proper and orderly handover of power and time to consolidate the regime under the new leader. Both the military and smaller nationalist and communist parties were believed to be unwilling to or too weak to take advantage of any other situation.⁴²

Anti-Communist Actions by the West in Iraq 1955-1958 in Perspective

It is exceedingly difficult to find either British or US government documents that mention the ICP prior to 1955. Western governments judged the threat to the Nuri regime minimal, and other opposition groups and factors were considered more important

⁴⁰ Foreign Relations 1955-57, 12, 988-990, January 15, 1956.

⁴¹ Foreign Relations 1955-57, 12, 998, 999, July 17, 1956,.

⁴² Foreign Relations 1955-57, , 12, 1000-1002, July 17, 1956.

until 1945 due to the Soviet backing of the war effort. The first detailed post-war assessment came from a 1955 working group report to Secretary of State Dulles which said that the ICP was effectively a non-actor politically, that the ban on its activities first imposed in 1927 and strictly implemented since the end of the War was largely effective, and found that membership was under two thousand and sympathizers were estimated at less than ten thousand. However, the State Department felt that if Iraq were invaded by the USSR, enough ICP members were in position to form a reliable and formidable espionage network through their connections to more benign left-wing groups and positions in the academic and economic establishment of Iraq.⁴³

Considering the concern the US showed over possible Soviet intervention directly in Iraq, their estimation of the resilience and seriousness of the ICP threat was a significant underestimation. The main recommendations by the state department were assistance with penal reform to prevent the spread of communism in jail settings, controls on the politicization of the courts that had allowed some Communists to be set free due to political connections even as more were being arrested and convicted on much less evidence, and extension of censorship laws to include on-campus and in-class activities at Baghdad University.⁴⁴

This conviction that the ICP was largely a transplant with no native support and thus easily contained was the biggest factor in the overlooking of the internal threats to the Iraqi regime. The military was considered trustworthy, the opposition splintered, and

⁴³ Foreign Relations 1955-57, 12, 979-980, December 14, 1955.

⁴⁴ Foreign Relations 1955-57, 12, 983-984, December 14, 1955.

the Communist Party irrelevant on a broader scale as long as restrictions on their activities were kept in place. All of these conclusions were incorrect. Between 1956 and 1958 a growing mass of popular and official opposition to Nuri, the crown prince, and their policies would lead to a temporary unification around the elimination of the regime by the major political opposition groups and the army.

British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd called Secretary of State Christian Herter on March 11, 1958 to express surprise at the demands and insecurity of the Iraqi regime. Nuri had demanded a five million pound advance to finance a major propaganda campaign, a long-term line of credit, and the delivery of new fighter planes and radio jamming equipment on no notice during a stopover on Lloyd's way to Manilla. Herter said Lloyd had "found Iraqi leaders to be in a very jittery state and acting as though they expected to be gone in six months. Nuri, and even the crown prince, were visibly worried."⁴⁵ The embassy in Iraq did not feel such urgency about the issue, although they agreed that the Iraqis needed both money and practical assistance in developing their propaganda program.⁴⁶

The proposed and recently executed Arab Union between Iraq and Jordan had affected major political problems in Iraq. Originally conceived of as a counterweight to Nasser and his United Arab Republic and as a means for drawing Jordan into the Baghdad Pact, the Arab Union treaty would have gradually merged many of the foreign

⁴⁵ US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958-1960*, Volume 12 (Washington, DC.: US Government Printing Office) , Keefer, Edward C. and Glenn W. Lafantasia eds., 295, 296.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

policy and security functions of the Iraqi and Jordanian governments. Nuri expressed to the state department that the assumption of the Jordanian deficit under the treaty had been a practical political problem and that nationalists initially encouraged by the pan-Arab overtones of the agreement had become discouraged by its slow implementation and the refusal of Kuwait especially, and other Arab nations generally, to join during its first year.⁴⁷ Nuri said that he needed the US and Great Britain to be ready in case of a coup and that he wanted their permission to take Kuwait by force if Kuwait refused to join the AU. The State Department felt that such actions would be ill-advised and would provoke a direct response from Nasser.⁴⁸

A crisis in Lebanon in early July 1958 led to discussion over US intervention in that country. The resulting UN/US/UK military intervention was expected to have no effect on the Iraqi regime by most, although the consideration of the possibility reveals a concern about its fragility. This operation was still in the planning stages in mid-July.⁴⁹

The Revolt of 1958 and Its Communist Support

Since 1955, a group of mid-ranking military officers who had first received their commissions during the reign of Ghazi had been meeting secretly on a regular basis to discuss the state of the Iraqi nationalist movement. Ranging in rank from lieutenant to colonel, these officers had significant clout with both more junior and more senior members of the armed forces, came from significant tribal groups or successful families,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 302.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 306, 307.

and believed to varying degrees in nationalist policies and causes. All of them felt Iraq had been constrained by the agreements that the government had been making with the western and regional powers. It took more than two years of organizing and waiting before key members of this group decided the most effective way to secure a nationalist future for Iraq would be through a coup. By all accounts, the lack of initiative on the part of Faisal II to check his uncle the crown prince and Nuri was the deciding factor. The so-called Free Officer Corps then used its political contacts to reach out to leaders of the ICP, the nationalist New Democratic Party and Istaqal,⁵⁰ and the newly formed Arab Socialist Baath party to warn them of the impending coup and seek cooperation in its immediate aftermath.⁵¹ The ICP also recommended non-communist left-wing politicians with some current political standing be part of the government.⁵²

The new leaders of the regime were to be Abd al-Karim Qasim and Abd al-Salaam Aref. Also included were leaders of future governments such as Tahir Yahya, and Abd Al-Rahman Arif. The regime had successfully held this group at bay initially by posting them as various attaches abroad or in less sensitive posts at home. The various groups of Free Officers, including the ones containing Qasim and Yahya did not fully merge until the spring of 1957. It acted without the input of the various political

⁵⁰ The New Democratic Party and Istaqal were respectively the Sunni and Shiite nationalist parties composed primarily of leaders who had supported King Ghazi in the 1930's. Neither were able to compete in the Nuri-dominated pre-coup political system, nor did either survive the ensuing decade.

⁵¹ Marr, 116-119.

⁵² Franzen, 74.

opposition leaders, though the leaders of the National Democratic Party, Istaqal, The Communist Party, and Baath Party were notified several days in advance.⁵³ This allowed them to coordinate the wind-down of various forms of civilian opposition to Nuri's regime while the Free Officers searched for the most opportune time to stage a coup. The coup went against a strict reading of the ICP's devotion to a pacifist turnover of power, but the benefits of cooperation with these other groups and the lack of blood on their own hands led them to support the new regime.⁵⁴

On July 13, 1958, this group of mid-level military officers led by Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the Nuri regime and monarchy and executed Nuri, Faisal, and the crown prince. Initial discussions within the US government of the possibility of intervening during the coup laid responsibility for handling the situation squarely on the shoulders of Britain, and much to the chagrin of the British Foreign Secretary, there was no intervention in time to save the leaders of the regime and the status quo.⁵⁵ This opened up a realm of new opportunities for all the major players in the region. With the monarchy that had been dependent on the United Kingdom for everything gone, the door was open for the United States, the USSR, or Nasser's Egypt/UAR to take a leading role in influencing the region. For obvious reasons, it was not in America's best interest for the USSR to take preeminence in the area. Still, American political leaders were equally afraid of Nasser and his attempts to align all of the Middle East under Pan-Arab

⁵³Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London, KPI, 1987), 47, 48.

⁵⁴ Franzen, 80, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 317, 18.

nationalist agendas. The UAR was the first and most successful experiment with this. It united Egypt and Syria with Nasser as president and the former Syrian leader as vice-president. This stoked fears by Iran and Israel of potential attacks on the Persian and Jewish states and interests they represented. Many times during this period, Iraq's leaders would attempt multiple times to annex Kuwait or start the process to join/revive the UAR. This would have been detrimental to the United States and its allies in the region, but America refrained from meddling. For various reasons, Nasser remained important in Iraq during this period, but unification talks never had any real chance of success.

The government formed by Qasim was on its face far to the left of its predecessor. Its first and only major accomplishment was the implementation of agrarian reform, which had many benefits for the regime: it satisfied nationalists that the tribes were being undermined, it satisfied communists that real moves toward social change and equality were being made, and it temporarily revived the economy.⁵⁶ As in many other regions after, the American government saw agrarian reform as a veiled first step toward communism. Given that most of the lands redistributed belonged to western interests or allies, agrarian reform benefited precisely those people who were most likely to support either nationalist or communist reforms more broadly.

The Qasim regime was not to last. The nationalist and leftist forces within the government had irreconcilable goals for the country, and Qasim's attempt to keep all sides happy eroded what support he had in the wake of the revolution. In foreign policy

⁵⁶ Shawdran, 29.

Qasim was unable to navigate his obligations on all sides successfully. to the US, Britain, the USSR, other Arab states, and especially Iran. The result was a chaotic situation over the next decade. The nationalist Baath Party that would fill the void in Iraq after 1968 was more hostile to US interests than any other. Any number of policy choices by the succeeding American administrations would contribute to that result, but perhaps the most significant choice of the Eisenhower administration in this area was to cater to the fears of the shah of Iran with regard to Qasim. The reasons for this decision and the effects it had on both the Iraqi and Iranian communist movements are discussed in Chapter 4.

US Reaction to the 1958 Revolution

The reaction of American policymakers to the 1958 revolution in Iraq was extreme caution. There was some acknowledgement that Qasim was the most friendly possible leader for the USSR and UAR. However, the broader geopolitical realities were immediately acknowledged:

The Coup d'etat in Iraq accelerated the deterioration of the Western position in the Near East. The fall of the Iraqi monarch has further reduced the possibility of carrying out a policy to develop the Arab Union as a counter-weight to the UAR. Other conservative Arab regimes face increased internal opposition and are now leaning toward Nasser. The introduction of US troops in Lebanon and UK troops in Jordan has been interpreted as further identifying the United States as the opponent of Pan-Arab Nationalism. Soviet support of the Pan-Arab nationalist

movement and of Nasser has also been greatly highlighted. Popular feeling in the Arab world, even in such states as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, is generally favorable to the Iraqi coup and hostile to US intervention in Lebanon and UK intervention in Jordan.⁵⁷

This makes it clear that the disdain and hostility of the US toward Nasser was viewed as pivotal to the revolt in 1958. US intervention to prevent another such revolt in Lebanon and limited British work in Jordan prevented the overthrow of regimes that were somewhat more stable than the Iraqi regime or had more forewarning. It is likely that intervention to save the monarchy would have been impossible, but the consequences of the fall of the monarchy were a broader US policy setback in the wider Middle East. Chapter 3 will cover the reasons Pan-Arab nationalism was such a challenge for the US and its relations to the Monarchy, and Chapter 4 will explore how this dynamic changed Iraqi-Iranian relations. Over the next two years, the military and economic aid to Iraq ceased and the US waited to see how the new regime would act, only to see it fall.

Analysis of the Efficacy and Effects of US Anti-Communist Activity

American relations with and policy regarding Iraq during the Eisenhower administration had some of the same general objectives as US policies in most parts of the world: to contain the Soviet Union, to limit the spread of communist ideas and structures more broadly, and to foster regional cooperation between states with strong ties to the US. In the case of Iraq, the program of backing the regime, military aid, and

⁵⁷ “Issues Arising Out of the Situation in the Near East,” WHITE HOUSE OFFICE, OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS: Records, 1952-61, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 20.

political oppression had some chance of working, and largely did. In a nation only moderately developed and possessing a culture deferential to authority and in transition from a nearly medieval Ottoman backwater to something more modern, more plural, and slightly more open to the outside world, many of the forms of assistance offered to the Iraqi regime were logical and well-thought-out.

The crown prince and Nuri's regime was not foolish either. They understood that the structure had come to rely on military support, Western backing, and the calming of pan-Arab and nationalist sentiment. Most of their internal and security policies fit this program while leaving the door open for more reform once oil development and the economic growth assumed to come with it became enough to allow broader investment. Both the Palace and Government in Iraq were playing the long game, trying to keep Iraq independent, and governing with far more stability than most other regimes in the region.

The fundamental error made by both the Iraqi regime and the Eisenhower administration was to focus on regional cooperation to the extent they did. Since the creation of the state of Iraq, and especially from the time of King Ghazi, Arab nationalism or lesser forms of inter-Arab cooperation were the main foreign policy objective of all the people that the regime needed to court: the military, the intelligentsia, the nationalists, etc. The policy the United States encouraged and Nuri and his cadre especially embraced focused too much on cooperation with Turkey, Iran, and to some extent Pakistan. There were also inherent problems with maintaining such close relationships with both Britain and the United States. The durability of this policy itself is somewhat surprising because of its unpopularity with all the people who mattered. The

revolt of 1958 and the broader policy of the ICP in light of this foreign policy problem were intertwined with other.

The oppression and censorship of the Iraqi regime worked. Communism had little if any real chance at making organic inroads into the Iraqi public in the 1950s even without it. The aid the United States and Great Britain gave the Iraqi regime was not so inflammatory in and of itself as to cause a longer-term issue. However, by marginalizing those nationalist forces in the country, ignoring the beliefs and agendas of the mid-level officers mentored and supported by King Ghazi as young officers, and allying Iraq, Britain, and the United States to Turkey and Iran so prominently, the regionalist policy drove all the disparate elements of the opposition together. The result was a revolt that gave the ICP its one real chance at power or influence within Iraq in the person of Qasim. To the extent that he was the figure in the 1958 revolt with the ear of all the various groups and a leftist in his own right (though not a communist), Qasim and his regime gave the ICP its only day in the sun. When Qasim's regime collapsed in 1961, the ICP lost its one real potential ally. The nationalist Baath party eventually took power in 1968 and the ICP was effectively destroyed even before then, but it remains that the ICP need never have had a chance to succeed. The lost decade and Baath resurgence were also bad for US foreign policy vis-à-vis the broader struggle with communism and the broader national interest. Having made an enemy of the nationalists, the United States would not regain their friendship.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SHAH AND EISENHOWER—FEARS OF SOCIALISM IN IRAN

Evaluating American anticommunist policy in Iraq before and during the 1950s requires understanding the complex interplay between the Iraqi Communist Party, the Iraqi government, the US, and the United Kingdom. In some ways that makes identifying problems and tensions that hampered US policy a simpler exercise. The situation in Iran is in almost perfect contrast to that situation. After the fall of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, the US, UK and Iranian governments were largely in lockstep on actual policy and activity. The relatively weak ICP is also a bad template for comparison with the relatively strong, if still small, Tudeh party in Iran. This makes the interplay between the Iranian government and its international allies more nuanced but no less pivotal.

Whereas American policy in Iraq shifted due to a gradual warming of relations and the encouragement of the United Kingdom, the entire Eisenhower administration's approach to Iran was driven by a single act conceived in the late Truman administration and executed in Eisenhower's first year: the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadeq. The overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadeq is still controversial, and it will be impossible to escape discussing the difficulties directly created by that coup. However, the focus of this section is on the seven years after the overthrow of Mossadeq. Even if the overthrow of Mossadeq was a poor choice by the Eisenhower administration, the conciliatory tone taken towards the shah afterwards was worse for the interests of the United States.

Iranian communism hit its high-water mark with the elevation of Mossadeq, but US-Iranian policy had little direct effect on the structure of the party and produced further animosity toward the regime. The open hostility by the shah and United States to the only forces in Iran seriously considering Westernization and democracy in their fullest sense led to the temporary alliance of the Iranian left with the Islamic fundamentalists that led to the Islamic revolution.

The Shah, Iran in 1950 and the Rise of Mossadeq

Iran, formerly Persia, had retained its independence during the rush for colonies in the late nineteenth century and the carving out of League of Nations mandates after World War I. That period had brought dynastic change to a new, western looking Pahlavi dynasty. Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was the second shah of the dynasty, brought to power in 1941 by a mix of internal power struggle and foreign intervention by the United Kingdom, which was concerned about his father Reza Pahlavi's pro-Nazi policies causing disruption in Iraq. Iran became a British protectorate for the duration of the war, but the new shah was deeply involved from the start.

The first few years after the war produced significant economic growth, democratizing tendencies, and significant pro-western sentiment in Iran. The first government of Reza Shah was representative of the broad spectrum of pro-western modern political thought, banning only overt communists and islamists, both of which ideologies had minimal popular support at the time. It appeared at first as if Iran were going to become a strong, relatively democratic ally in the Middle East and Central Asia for the western powers as the Iron Curtain fell.

However, democracy is never predictable, and the first sincerely open elections in 1950 resulted in the elevation of left-wing elements of the National Front led by Mohammed Mossadeq, although the shah was able to keep him out of office for over a year. The National Front had similar ideological contours as the prewar French National Front government: largely secular, highly fragmented, social-democratic and nationalist, with a light communist presence. It was the last two portions that worried British interests in the aftermath of Mossadeq's election. Mossadeq won office with the stated goal of bringing economic prosperity to the masses and limiting foreign influence. To suspicious British and increasingly American policymakers, this sounded an awful lot like a preview of communism.

Communism in Iran in 1950

The Communist movement in Iran dates back to the era of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Up until the period from 1920 to 1930, most communists in Iran (then Persia) were part of the Persian Communist Party, which during the period during the end of and directly after World War I was a direct subsidiary of the Russian Bolsheviks.⁵⁸ An attempt at revolution 1935-1936 failed because of broad lack of support.⁵⁹ Shortly thereafter, the party split amicably in Iran between the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and what would become Tudeh. The Azerbaijan Democratic Party was nationalist and supported the removal of the ethnic Azerbaijani parts of Iran from Iranian

⁵⁸ Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 19, 36.

⁵⁹ Zabih, 37.

rule and revolution in the resulting Azerbaijan. Tudeh was a leftist communist party in the image of such leftist communists from the early Soviet Union as Leon Trotskii with roots in social democratic activism. After the split resulting from the permanent loss of Azerbaijan by Iran, the remaining activists quickly coopted the main anti-fascist party formed during World War II and thus preserved its existence less as a social-democratic mass movement (although it would remain that in part) than as a traditional, relatively independent, and remarkably purist Communist party. Neither of these positions endeared the communist movement in Iran to international communism, dominated as it was by Stalin.⁶⁰

A crackdown in Azerbaijan's government in 1945 and the resolution of the dispute over the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan and Iran over the next year both boosted the Tudeh party and communist movement in Iran to its greatest heights and effectively eliminated the Azerbaijan Democratic Party. As the countries had settled their disputes, the alliance of the parties was not needed, and the ADP's leadership was arrested. These developments removed the two greatest allies of Tudeh from politics.⁶¹ Tudeh had three ministers in the coalition cabinet formed on August 1, 1946 after the elections to the Iranian Parliament earlier that year. Two other members represented the broader left. This was the high-water mark for Iranian communism and also its main undoing. The ADP had always been the more revolutionary of the two parties, and its dissolution

⁶⁰ Zabih, 115.

⁶¹ Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999) 4, 5.

resulted in four years of internal debate and dissension within Tudeh as to its path. Tudeh's great advantage (like most communist parties) being its organization, the party could not survive such an internal break intact and unscathed.⁶²

With the removal of the Soviet threat and the Red Army garrisons from contested territory that had accompanied it, the Tudeh party lost both its most reliable block of support and its biggest liability. In this case, the perception and the reality had changed in tandem. Previously the more "moderate" of the two communist parties, Tudeh had calculated a position where it could be officially at odds with the Soviets while ensuring their interests were protected. Without the guidance of the Soviets, the party's native leadership split between those who wanted new blood in the highest positions in hopes of securing revolution and those who wanted to preserve the gains and power made in the fifteenth parliament (late 1940s).⁶³ This internal division would continue until 1950 with the Second Tudeh Party Congress and the beginning of the nationalist tumult that would elevate Mossadeq. In the meantime, Tudeh would develop a reputation as an organ of elitists and lose most of its working-class luster that along with the Azerbaijan crisis had lent it its initial legitimacy.⁶⁴ However, Tudeh did the hard work of surviving its internal split and an attempt to outlaw it at precisely its weakest moment. Tudeh was thus able to take advantage of one last chance to remake the Iranian state.⁶⁵

⁶² Zabih, 116-123.

⁶³ Zabih, 125-127.

⁶⁴ Zabih, 146-148.

⁶⁵ Behrooz, 5, 6.

The Oil Controversy and The CIA Coup

Initially, it appeared that the American government would be able and willing to work with Mossadeq. He was by far less than an ideal partner and backed by elements that the Eisenhower administration found unsavory, but he had been democratically elected on a platform of cooperation and regional stability, economic reform and not revolution, and further democratization and westernization.

The British government was not so forgiving early on. The first instance of open defiance was the decision by Mossadeq's cabinet to nationalize the Iranian oil industry in 1952. This was a direct blow to the oil companies based in the UK that owned most of the drilling rights and infrastructure in Iran, and had done so since 1901 under the auspices of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).⁶⁶ It was also a characteristic move that had both nationalist and communist overtones. When the Iranians initially refused even to speak about compensation unless the British and AIOC settled all other outstanding counterclaims, the British responded by demanding the US develop a plan to remove Mossadeq. The British believed that Mossadeq was incompetent and not ready for the job of prime minister, to which he had been elevated in late April 1951. This hard-line dismissal of Mossadeq as a partner in solving the crisis set into motion the chain of events leading to Mossadeq's removal.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Mary Ann Heiss. *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 5.

⁶⁷ Heiss, 64.

The American government was not enthusiastic about overthrowing a reasonably friendly government for one economic policy infraction. The US initiated a series of talks on the issue of the nationalization and the broader Iranian interests in controlling its oil reserves, almost all of them informal.⁶⁸ At first the process seemed to work. Both sides moved to less stringent positions, and progress on the issue seemed not only possible but likely.

Gradually it came to be clear that the Mossadeq government was not amicable to a re-liberalization of the Iranian oil industry. Mossadeq and the Iranian parliament believed that AIOC and by extension the British had harmed Iran far too frequently. Mossadeq's stance that the counterclaims would overwhelm any compensation and his emphasis on nationalization as necessary to bolster Iranian national pride were met with derision by the US and UK and not so subtle support by the Soviets.⁶⁹ The latter was likely a ruse, as the Tudeh party had opposed nationalization since early 1950 as a bid by the US to get the Iranian government to make a token gesture against the British while simultaneously undermining the economic arguments communists were making for even more expansive nationalizations.⁷⁰

Mossadeq visited the United States in late 1951 and rejected several mediation offers and temporary agreements during his visit. On January 9, 1952 Mossadeq accused the British of conspiring with enemies of the state to undermine the Iranian economy and

⁶⁸ Heiss, 68-72.

⁶⁹ Heiss, 77, 78.

⁷⁰ Hess, 21-23.

government.⁷¹ This was a brilliant political stroke and bought Mossadeq needed time to attempt new elections in April and minimize the damage. The resulting losses by Mossadeq's forces in favor of old-guard politicians and a few true opposition members led Mossadeq to seek American economic assistance.⁷² In mid-July, he moved to position himself as minister of war in the new government in an attempt to undermine the shah's control over the military. Less than a week later the International Court of Justice sided with the Iranians on the nationalization complaint submitted by Britain, and Mossadeq's supporters moved to remove caretaker Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam who had been backed by the British. Mossadeq had won on all fronts.⁷³ He responded by revoking diplomatic relations with Britain.⁷⁴

Neither the British, the Truman administration, nor the incoming Eisenhower administration was impressed by these moves. Despite continuing negotiations from November 7, 1952 and intensive efforts from January 12-17, 1953 to solve the crisis by mediation, Mossadeq refused to budge.⁷⁵ The Eisenhower administration attempted further negotiations on different terms and tried to pressure the British into accepting less compensation. Mossadeq accused the British of attempting to undermine him and stated

⁷¹ Heiss, 113 and , Darioush Bayandor. *Iran and the CIA: The Fall of Mosaddeq Revisited* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 50.

⁷² Bayador, 51.

⁷³ Bayadour, 55, 56.

⁷⁴ Heiss, 150.

⁷⁵ Heiss, 164-165.

he would be “stoned to death” for accepting deals along British lines. Having determined that Mossadeq was not only unreliable but also now openly hostile to western interests, discussion during the new administration moved to the attempt to remove him from office by various means.⁷⁶

It was perhaps the threats that accompanied the closing offer from Mossadeq on May 28 that sealed his fate. He warned of “dire consequences” if Iran’s economic needs were not taken care of. The Eisenhower and Truman administrations had in the past assumed that such threats were threats that the US-UK line was going to force either the fall of the Mossadeq government in favor of a more Soviet-friendly regime or for Mossadeq to align with the USSR. Neither threat—that his regime’s collapse was imminent or that he would leave the western side in the Cold War—was acceptable.⁷⁷

The CIA, the shah, dissident groups, and the military joined together to plot a quick removal of Mossadeq using the shah’s powers. A military escort delivered a writ of removal to Mossadeq on the evening of August 15-16, 1953. Mossadeq had been tipped off about this planned arrest of him and his military chief by a member of the Tudeh leadership whose wife was the military chief’s wife’s cousin.⁷⁸ The military officers were arrested when they arrived and the military chief left his home and went to his office where he could not be arrested.

⁷⁶ Heiss, 170-171.

⁷⁷ Heiss, 178-179.

⁷⁸ Bayadour, 95. 96.

The resulting revolts and the lack of support from the shah led to the limiting of the base Mossadeq could rely on politically. The resulting Tudeh-oriented revolts and Mossadeq's refusal to swear off their demand for the deposition of the shah worried the UK and US even more than Mossadeq's survival. The shah's new choice for prime minister, Fazlollah Zahedi, decided to fight back and the US and UK decided to aid him. Pro-shah street demonstrations were organized and saved Zahedi and the shah from having to stage a full military coup to achieve their desired military government. By the nineteenth, the military and its supporters had Mossadeq's residence surrounded and much of the militia leadership of Tudeh arrested. Mossadeq could no longer arm his few available followers. He surrendered that evening to the CIA-Iranian military forces outside his residence.⁷⁹

Iranian-American Relations 1953-1960

Shortly after the overthrow of the Mossadeq government, the Shah returned to Iran and to power. If anything, the Shah became more friendly to western, and particularly American, interests and concerns in the immediate aftermath of the coup. The alliance was driven by several different considerations.

First, sales of Iranian oil to western nations during the Mossadeq government had come to a near standstill due to US diplomatic pressure. Given the substantial resources in this regard that the USSR had at its own disposal, US diplomats had made a striking case to the newly reinstalled Shah that his country's economic prosperity and future development (as well as his own power) required a steadfastly western-oriented vision.

⁷⁹ Bayadour, 110-112.

That this was systemic policy is further illustrated by NSC 175, the first full National Security Council evaluation of Iran after the overthrow of Mossadeq. The initial draft of NSC 175 was more explicit in claiming cause-and-effect, claiming bullishly that a true westernization program would bring broad prosperity to the Iranian people and in essence permanently cut off any grass-roots communist support in Iran, but the final draft retained the emphasis on Iranian economic development, oil sales, and aid being dependent on the continued marginalization of the Tudeh party.⁸⁰ The NSC was also optimistic about the potential redevelopment of UK-Iranian relations and a settlement of the nationalization claim that had led to the coup. Given British strategic interests and relationships in the broader Middle East, especially in Iraq, this was critically important for US policymakers if a coordinated response to the USSR in the region was going to be undertaken.

The Shah's initial government was traditionalist in its approach to power and conservative in its makeup, but at least had a democratic patina and a reformist attitude. This was due to efforts by the shah to illustrate opposition not to western-style democracy but to left-wing or communist government while maintaining maximal power for himself. This failed to produce any lasting legitimacy for the shah. As early as NSC 175, one of the NSC's biggest concerns was that the shah's authority and capacity to govern already relied overwhelmingly on the military.⁸¹ This naturally led to fears of a counter-coup. For the next couple of years, American relations with Iran would be overwhelmingly

⁸⁰ NSC Documents, Box 8, NSC 175, 3-4.

⁸¹ Ibid, 10.

focused on provision of military aid, coordination in event of a counter-coup, and attempting to get Iranian oil revenues back online.

The next major review of American policy in Iran came with NSC 5602/1 on January 15, 1955. This document was largely unchanged from NSC 175 in overall emphasis, although it was significantly more detailed. However, some of the internal progress reports from the NSC, particularly the third such report of July, 25, 1956 are indicative of the general tenor of American relations with Iran and American concerns between January 1955 and the Iraqi revolution in 1958. When combined with increasingly anxious diplomatic cables, the fuller picture comes into focus quite clearly.

Although initially receiving minimal notice, the shah's abrupt seizure of direct governmental powers and undermining of the office of prime minister in April 1955 eventually severely limited the continued political stability within Iran.⁸² Although the NSC and other American officials did not realize this at the time, this period of significant weakness coincided with a period of extreme internal weakness within Tudeh and in the opposition more generally. Although relatively confident that the fall of the regime was not imminent, there was no doubting that this position rendered the shah weaker than had he retained a quasi-independent prime minister.⁸³

However, perhaps the most worrying developments were on the economic front. Iran was unevenly applying its aid and oil money, diverting as much of it as possible to long term infrastructure and additional military buildups without taking into account UK

⁸² NSC Series, Box 14, Progress Report on NSC 5602/1, July 25, 1956, 1.

⁸³ Ibid.

and US concerns that the government was undermined by the lack of recovery in the standard of living. This was further accelerated by demands from the shah that the US dramatically increase military aid to Iran to replace aid lost from the UK during Mossadeq's nationalization. The NSC was particularly dubious about this proposition, fearing that this would only serve to increase the total buildup in the region and would lead to complete dependence of the shah on US military aid.⁸⁴

After 1958, US-Iranian relations were complicated by the Shah's concerns over the failure of the Iraqi monarchy and his fears of communist encirclement and the failure of the Baghdad Pact. These concerns deeply complicated US relations with both Iran and Iraq, as well as with the larger Middle East, and will be discussed in Chapter 4. However, a few other points of interest remain to be addressed.

First, the NSC and State Department both expressed alarm at both the continuing decline of the internal Iranian situation and at the shah's increasingly demanding position vis-à-vis the US. The NSC references "indiscriminate arrests" as symptomatic of the problem in its May 8, 1958 progress report. The shah's three years of personal government had not resulted in progress, the Iraqi regime was destabilizing, and a domestic opposition had begun to coalesce around opposition to the shah himself. At the same time the Shah was demanding yet more increases in aid and not displaying the expected hostility to the Soviet Union. The NSC concluded that this was a bargaining ploy, but one that complicated the relationship unnecessarily.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁵ BNS documents, OCB report on Iran (5703/1), May 8, 1958, 1-3.

In mid-to-late 1958, a number of new problems, some at least tangentially related to Iraq and some completely independent of those concerns, took shape or expanded. Most troubling was the growing disaffection of the mid-level officers in the army with the shah and the growing distrust of the middle class and intelligentsia. All of these had preceded the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy. The response from the shah was uncharacteristically moderate, however, and small-scale introductory economic reforms were implemented. This accommodation combined with a narrowing of the crackdown on anti-government forces to focus more specifically on militant groups and Communists, provided some hope to the US government that the shah might have some medium-term stability and in retrospect might provide an explanation for the relative longevity of his regime as compared to that in Iraq.⁸⁶ Fear by the NSC that the reforms and continuing cooperation might backfire if the Shah fell, making an anti-US and pro-Soviet outcome more likely counterbalanced the progress brought by reform.⁸⁷

The Eisenhower administration responded to the coup in Iraq by increasing military aid to the shah contingent upon a broader proactive mobilization of forces and better utilization of economic development resources. For once, this seemed to work for a short while. A temporary mobilization of the full one hundred sixty eight thousand-strong Iranian Army took place shortly after the agreement was reached, as compared to a normal thirty-seven thousand-man rotation. Meanwhile, the NSC balanced the probable

⁸⁶ BNS documents, OCB report on Iran (5703/1), October 8, 1958, 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 3.

need for more economic aid with the increasing problems that Iran was having balancing its budget. The NSC feared that more aid might encourage Iran to continue overspending on its military and reduce the regime's long-term stability.⁸⁸

With the Iraqi revolution and the prominent role Kurds took in leadership in the first two interim governments, Kurdish problems finally became important enough to be the focus of an NSC security review. The relative poverty and isolation of Iranian Kurds were both feared as potential causes for concern and viewed as potential points of leverage. The shah's response of reallocating economic aid to Kurds and developing a broader propaganda campaign in the region was received well by the NSC.⁸⁹ Also of moderate continuing concern was the shah's divorce from his wife, which resulted in instability in the line of succession.⁹⁰

Finally, the shah began to move toward slightly closer cooperation with the USSR after his visit to Washington, DC in June, 1958. None of the sources make it completely clear if this was approved of by the president, but the NSC seemed encouraged by the general support of the usually hostile forces in Iranian politics to a calibrated warming of Iranian-Soviet relations and by the limited nature of the thaw.⁹¹

This optimism did not last. In advance of a visit to Washington by Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in August 1959, the shah sent what would be the first letter in an

⁸⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

unusual flurry of direct correspondence between the president and the shah. The shah was concerned primarily with continued Soviet propaganda activities and with a perceived insufficiency of military aid, particularly in anti-aircraft technology.⁹² The accompanying note from Ambassador to Iran Edward T. Wailes typifies the traditional American response: the shah was being honest, but he was vastly over-estimating the hostility and strength of the Iraqi government. He advised the president to take up the issue of propaganda with Khrushchev at the proper moment and advised that the current aid budget before Congress would meet most of the shah's needs.⁹³

It is evident from this exchange that Soviet pressure on the government in Tehran was increasing dramatically. In a September 16 memo Secretary Herter concluded that the negotiations between Iran and the USSR had been overwhelmingly negative. The Soviets had repeatedly urged Tehran to declare full neutrality. The secretary recommended that during the upcoming visit to Moscow, the president should again voice concerns over Iran's sovereignty and that the trip should be extended to include a brief stop for consultation with the shah.⁹⁴ This caution seems to have been based largely on a series of threatening correspondences forwarded to Secretary Herter on September 14, urging Iran to adopt full neutrality, threatening enforcement of a 1921 non-aggression treaty between the USSR and Iran, intimating that the USSR had full knowledge of all

⁹² Papers of Secretary of State Herter, Box 8, Letter dated August 17, 1959 from Shah of Iran to President Eisenhower, 1, 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁴ Papers of Secretary Herter, Box 8, Memorandum to the President, The Khrushchev Visit: Soviet Pressure on Iran, September 16, 1959.

US-Iranian policy discussions including referencing specific notes from the president to the Shah, and suggesting that the USSR was making headway in a non-aggression pact with Turkey. That the shah and Prime Minister Ansari would take this to be a veiled threat of invasion is not surprising.⁹⁵ These dynamics would in turn drive a deeper wedge between Iran and Iraq in particular, and this will be discussed in Chapter 4. However, it seems clear that these threats forced the shah into taking concrete steps to implement US policy proposals and solidified his alliance with both the US and its regional allies.

Tudeh, The Soviets, and Iran During the 1950's

In late 1949, the Shah's secret police arrested several senior Tudeh party leaders. The party's rehabilitation during the previous year or so can be seen from the response they formulated to this crisis. Perhaps the only major wing of Tudeh not damaged was its paramilitary wing. On December 15, 1950, the paramilitary forces of the Tudeh party broke into the prison where the senior leaders were being held and freed them and a few other sympathetic prisoners.⁹⁶ The six senior leaders thus rescued joined with the two who had remained in hiding and took advantage of the coming nationalist storm to perform clandestine work. Three of these members would take part in the nineteenth Soviet Party Conference in 1951, which temporarily limited their activities but reinstated Tudeh as a full member of the international communist system.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Papers of Secretary Herter, Box 8, Letter from Ambassador Wailes to Secretary of State Herter, September 14, 1959, 1-3.

⁹⁶ Zabih, 175.

⁹⁷ Zabih, 175.

The first two years of Mossadeq's government were characterized by Tudeh hostility to the oil nationalization plan. The Soviet press praised Mossadeq for the nationalization, and Tudeh broadly supported the nationalization of the major industries as any good Marxist-Leninist party would. However, the patriotic tinge given the nationalization by Mossadeq limited Tudeh's potential participation. Removing yet another shackle of British imperialism was good, as was limiting capitalist excess. However, the definition of the nationalization as a matter of national pride and viability and the potential for military action limited the Soviets', and thus Tudeh's, ability and incentive to provide concrete support for Mossadeq or the Iranian oil industry.⁹⁸ This antagonized Tudeh's leadership, which prompted them to take a more oppositional approach to the scheme, proposing (though not advocating) a more gradual, orderly transition and a handover to more purely Marxist worker-cooperatives. However, even given all this maneuvering, Mossadeq had managed to coopt the main policy proposal of the Tudeh party, leading to a decline in its popularity. After this, whenever Soviet sympathizers or party regulars would stage a protest, Mossadeq would allow a small window before asking the Tudeh leadership to clear the streets, and Tudeh would comply, fearing more concrete actions.⁹⁹

The Tudeh leadership warned Mossadeq of the impending coup in advance, and Mossadeq was either powerless to prevent it or unwilling to. Having advanced warning, most of the party leadership fled to the Soviet Union or other friendly nations, and the

⁹⁸ Behrooz, 9, 10.

⁹⁹ Behrooz, 10, 11.

remaining leadership cooperated. This led to an unusual paradox of senior members mostly escaping punishment while mid-level and rank-and-file members took over control of the apparatus, resisted the coup, and became heroes in the international and national communist movements.¹⁰⁰ That the rank-and-file were more militant and the leadership far more cautious and conciliatory seems out of place, but there is some evidence that the purist leadership could not support a rebellion or revolution not supported by the working classes more broadly. Had the mob action continued and/or a persistent popular uprising developed, the leadership could have easily returned and led a more militant rank-and-file in a full counter-revolution, although that would have had a narrow chance of success. In any case, preparations were made for an armed resistance but abandoned quickly, leaving the rank-and-file to pick up the pieces over the next decade.¹⁰¹

Given the lack of organization of the Communist Party at the time, demoralization set in. The young intellectuals of the party felt hijacked by a party leadership too cozy with Mossadeq and too willing to concede control in a military coup. Although the more radical parts of the Tudeh movement never came to support Mossadeq, his rule was definitely superior to that of a monarch. This dispirited youth would slowly gain control of the Tudeh Party after the shah successfully drove it underground. The party would emerge in the 1960s much smaller but more activist, militant, and unyielding. In the end, this drive toward radical Marxism would lead to irreparable fractures and full

¹⁰⁰ Behrooz, 11.

¹⁰¹ Zabih, 202-204.

participation in the 1979 revolution and the subsequent destruction of communism in Iran. All of the small factions that emerged from the Revolution were largely impotent, divided among themselves, and bereft of a plan of action for resisting political Islam.¹⁰²

Results of American Policy in Iran

Thus during the Eisenhower administration several key decisions were made that would define the course of US-Iranian relations for the next seventeen years. The shah's legitimacy after the 1953 coup was already limited. The US decision to reinstate him, the backing he received even as he became more belligerent and nationalistic, and his suppression of dissent during these years would only complicate US policy. In Chapter 4 the development of Iraqi-Iranian relations after the coup in 1958 will be discussed, and those changes in relations and the outlook of the shah's regime, were important. However, the status of the United States as the shah's primary international backer and the concessions that American policy makers up to and including President Eisenhower made to the Shah of Iran allowed him to overreach.

The Tudeh party would fail of its own accord over the next couple of decades. Iran was again a place where communism was unlikely to take hold from the beginning short of a Soviet invasion. The pressure exercised by the United States against Mossadeq and then his overthrow would set a broader precedent. Leftist and modernist forces, left leaderless and marginalized by the CIA coup, would on a broader scale have extreme difficulty organizing over the next couple of decades. In response, they would partner with the Islamic fundamentalist groups in an attempt overthrow the shah. This limited

¹⁰² Behrooz 32, 33, 74-76, 104, 105.

amount of cooperation to meet mutual goals would lead to what was initially a democratic revolution in Iran in the 1970s to a position where it could be coopted by the Islamic radicals that still rule Iran to this day. Without the CIA coup and the encouragement by the Eisenhower administration to value stability over dissent and reform, the history of Iran would have been much different. Perhaps the Mossadeq government would have opened the door to a communist or Soviet-aligned state in Iran. Doubtless that eventuality would have been unacceptable. However, blanket US support not conditioned on actual reform forced the nationalists and democrats in Iran to work with those people who were willing to work with them.

This is not a case where the level of US involvement or meddling that would have been ideal is at all clear. What is clear is that US policy in Iran allowed the shah to write himself a blank check. When the Iranian people objected, the United States and the broader West were stuck with a dangerous power that none could have foreseen. Again, the support of a dictatorial regime friendly to the United States in the Middle East without allowing for internal politics and reform resulted in no short or long-term gains against communism and resulted only in long-term losses for broader US security and policy interests.

CHAPTER THREE: HOW PAN-ARAB SOCIALISM CONFUSED US POLICY

There is not much of a historiography focusing on US-Iraqi relations during the Eisenhower Administration. Given the pace of change in Iraqi society and governance during the 1950s, it might have been impossible for any administration to keep up with all the potential risks and failures. However, it still is clear from the evidence in Chapter One that several knowable and addressable concerns were not addressed by the Eisenhower administration. The laser-like focus on containment of the Soviet Union caused several foreign policy difficulties over the long term. Given Iraq's geographic position, demographics, and then-recent history many of the problems that caused the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 should have been foreseen and could have been addressed by the United States along with Iraq and its allies had enough attention been paid to other factors.

This being said, some of the most persuasive possible arguments in defense of US anticommunist policy in Iraq in particular are claims that focus on Arab Nationalism. Due to both the complex nature of the Nasserite Arab Nationalist movement and the various tensions it caused in the region, a number of different possible proposals could be argued. The first of the two most significant is the claim that to argue that insufficient attention paid to Arab Nationalism (and by extension Arab Socialism) by both the Iraqi government and its allies in the US and UK in favor of a focus on the threat of the USSR is dishonest because the two threats were identical. The more formidable argument is that the US and Iraqi regime did in fact pay enough attention to the Pan-Arab problem

politically and internationally, but that either chance or insufficient insight into the mid-level officers that staged the Free Officer Corps coup in 1958 was what prevented the Eisenhower administration from making better choices and taking more fitting action to prevent the coup and subsequent radicalization.

The first argument is easily dispatched by means of defining Arab Nationalism and putting the problems in Iraq into the broader geopolitical context of the region. That will be done in the first section of this chapter. The succeeding sections will build on that definition to illustrate the difficulties of the latter position, making it a less viable explanation than a misplaced focus.

Definitions of Pan-Arab Nationalism

As a political ideology, Arab Nationalism is a complex mixture of anticolonial resentment, European style nationalist philosophy, and Islamic religious conviction. Although some historians claim the first inklings of this philosophy were advanced by a group of Christian Arabs in Beirut from 1880 to 1883, the main strains of Arab Nationalism and the genesis of the movement that Nasser would spearhead and which would cause problems for the Iraqi government in the 1940's and 1950's began with the most significant Pan-Islamic thinker of the nineteenth century, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Himself a Persian Shiite of an objectivist mystic school, Al-Afghani did not believe in the broader tenets of Islam, but advocated for its use as a uniting mechanism to fight off European domination. Al-Afghani believed that pan-Islamic cooperation was preferable to pan-Arab cooperation or any other form of nationalism mainly for practical reasons. His emphasis was on finding the most effective way to remove the Europeans from the

greater Islamic and particularly Arab world. Because of these two positions, Al-Afghani's beliefs can be regarded as the first step toward secular nationalism in opposition to European encroachment in the Middle East and the beginnings of what would become Pan-Arab Nationalism. A number of his followers would modify and propagate his ideas for the two decades after his death in 1897, keeping the fires of unity alive until the end of World War I.¹⁰³

It was one of al-Afghani's ideological grandchildren, so to speak, who would establish the baseline for the Arab Nationalism that would come to prevail in Middle East in the fifty years after the end of World War I. Muhammad Rashid Rida, an ideological disciple of the Mufti of Egypt Muhammad Abduh, combined Abduh's hopeful approach to politics and appreciation for the more salient aspects of European nationalism with some of al-Afghani's more hostile and independence-minded rhetoric and a more traditionalist appreciation for Islam that eventually developed from a reform-minded mentality into Wahhabi literalism. Rida approached Abduh in hopes of learning both the philosophy of al-Afghani and the then-rising star's political motivations and hopes for Egypt and the broader Arab World. Under Rida pan-Arabism developed as a political means of both purifying Islam and removing the yoke of Western governments from Arabs. His hope was that this would allow the Arabs to regain their former position of power and prestige. At first the agency for this was to be a revived Ottoman government, although over time as the Sultan became more complicit with European powers in their

¹⁰³ Sylvia G Haim, *Arab Nationalism; an Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 7-15.

minds, and the Young Turk revolt that overthrew the religious machinery of the empire this ceased to be the case.¹⁰⁴

Arab Nationalism's primary occupation would from that point on be defining both what it meant to be an Arab and what form an Arab nation would take. Pan-Arabism then was first a nationalism searching for its nation and debating with itself over how to relate to that nation once it was found. All Arab Nationalists idealized a unified Arab front, which if taken literally would mean most of Iraq and Syria south through the Arabian Peninsula to current Sudan and west to at least Tunisia, but individual Arab Nationalists were also Egyptians or Syrians or Iraqis and proud to be so. This problem would confound the political discourse of Arab Nationalism and make it vulnerable to misinterpretation by even the best of scholars.¹⁰⁵ Even the coining of the term Arab Socialism by Nasser, intended to combine this vision with the egalitarian trappings of Communism as a way to remove its Islamic fangs, could bring this ideology nowhere near real Soviet Communism by any rational definition.¹⁰⁶

Problems Posed By Arab Nationalism in Iraq

Iraq's geographic location and religious and ethnic diversity placed it in an unusually difficult position internationally. Iraq was one of only two Arab states to come out of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire that was majority-Shiite, one of only four countries in the region with a significant Kurdish population, the most tribalistic and

¹⁰⁴ Haim, 18-32.

¹⁰⁵ Haim, 39.

¹⁰⁶ For reference, Nasser, "The Philosophy of the Revolution" in Haim, 229-231.

decentralized of the areas previously under Ottoman control, and home to many ethnic and religious minorities including ethnic Assyrians and various splintered Christian groups.¹⁰⁷ The shared Kurdish problem and the nearby Soviet border meant that Iraq had to work closely with Iran and Turkey. Iraq was also a charter member of the Arab League and thus bound by its charter to refrain from independent military cooperation with non-Arab regional powers.¹⁰⁸ Iraq also had treaty obligations to Britain and thus was subject to the influence of the UK and gradually over time became more subject to the pressure coming from the US as well. All of these factors led to a distinctly disjointed foreign policy and domestic politics.

In Chapter 1 documented numerous occasions when broader Nationalist and Pan-Arab tendencies caused problems, but it should be noted at the outset that Arab Nationalism occupied a particularly complicated place in the ideology of the initial Iraqi state and the regime before 1958. As early as the addition of the Mosul area to the Mandate in 1920, Sunni Arab politicians utilized Arab Nationalist rhetoric to consolidate their political position vis-a-vis the Kurdish minority and to secure the cooperation of the Shiite majority. In this way, Sunni rhetoric and limited self-government for the Kurds and Pan-Arab rhetoric along with strategic placement of token Shiites in the Cabinets, kept the post-mandate regime in a tenable political position. This was a delicate counter-

¹⁰⁷ For Reference, the other majority Shiite country in the former Ottoman Empire is Bahrain. The other significant Kurdish communities are in Turkey, Syria, and Iran.

¹⁰⁸ Marr, 108.

balance and one that Prime Minister Nuri and the Crown Prince were particularly good at executing.¹⁰⁹

One instance of difficulty before 1950 that is particularly illustrative of the creative tension embodied by these Pan-Arab and broader nationalist tendencies is the run-up to British reoccupation during World War II. In February 1940 Nuri resigned as prime minister with the expressed intent of forcing his main political rival at the time, Rashid Ali, to take up the position at an inconvenient time. Nuri found it difficult getting the Iraqi political establishment, including the king and military, to support the British during World War II and to break off ties with the one Axis power that had not broken off ties with them, Italy. As Iraq was bound by its treaties that ended the Mandate to aid Britain, this was untenable. Rashid Ali refused as prime minister to give in to British pressure and started moving the government in the direction with the broadest public support, deepening ties to Italy and seeking rapprochement with Germany and Japan. The anti-British and pro-unity sentiment was severe enough in Iraq at the time that fears by the British that the Iraqis might side with the Axis powers were more than reasonable. The British thus reoccupied Iraq and deposed Rashid Ali. This was easily the high-water mark of the actual implementation of Arab Nationalist policy and pan-Arab sentiment in the government before 1958. It would remain a cautionary tale for both the UK and US in their relations with the Iraqi regime after World War II. The result of these British

¹⁰⁹ Eppel, 25.

actions was the sometimes subtle, sometimes overt discouragement of Pan-Arab rhetoric by both the government and the western powers.¹¹⁰

After the withdrawal of British forces at the end of World War II, the majority of the elder statesmen in most Middle Eastern countries retrenched and sought outside support from the West or Soviets to shore up their international and domestic positions. By 1953 this had become more untenable in Iraq than elsewhere. King Faisal II had taken the throne and the Pan-Arab youth who wanted complete independence from Western influence were energized by his democratic ideals. It is against this backdrop that the US push for the Baghdad Pact is particularly stark as a turning point. The Baghdad Pact was the advent of US leadership in the area; the policy most reviled by the opposition Nationalist groups; a strategic gamble for the British that pitted their Iraqi, Iranian, and Pakistani interests against their interests in the rest of the Arab world; and in the eyes of the signatories and the United States the best possible strategy for holding off any potential Soviet aggression.¹¹¹

The Soviet Union was not blind to the opportunity this provided them to take the opposite stand. They were not above taking advantage of Egyptian President Nasser's regionalist ambitions despite his efforts to play the US and Soviets off against each other. As Soviet policy developed under Premier Nikita Khrushchev, it became increasingly clear that the Soviets would back any group opposing Western interests. The Soviets' direct support of Nasser's movement and Khrushchev's personal endorsement are well

¹¹⁰ Eppel, 45-7.

¹¹¹ Marr, 116-118.

documented, and their United Front strategy to undermine Western policy objectives by partnering with any and all groups opposed to specific Western goals can be connected directly to the early financing of the Nasserite Pan-Arab radio network Voice of the Arabs.¹¹²

In January 1957 the Voice of the Arabs denounced Nuri as a traitor specifically for the Baghdad Pact and his broader cooperation with the West and other regional powers. The characterization of such cooperation as “worse treachery than anything Zionism has done to Arabism” was both incendiary and potent. The Baghdad Pact can thus be seen as both an effective potential bulwark against Soviet aggression and as a broader touchstone on which Nasser was able to advance his personal feud with Nuri.¹¹³

It has already been established that the 1958 coup was driven largely by the alliance of Nationalists with other marginalized political groups including the ICP and dissatisfaction in the army with the Baghdad Pact. These constraints would continue into the post-coup regime. Deputy Prime Minister Abd Al-Salaam Arif favored quick realization of the Arab unity desired by many of the most hardline nationalists and supporters of Arab Socialism, while the reformist Qasim favored a strategy of domestic development and realignment, and the cabinet they created, though wielding minimal power, was a broad sampling of various opposition positions from immediate union with Egypt and Syria to Marxist realignment to more traditionally Western-style reform

¹¹² George Lenczowski. *The Political Awakening in the Middle East* (Englewood Cliffs., N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 169.

¹¹³ Marr, 108.

leaders. The problem of Nationalism began to weaken the new regime less than a week after its emergence.¹¹⁴

The internal Iraqi politics surrounding Arab Nationalist ideology was never easy. The US and UK were aware of both the geopolitical implications and the domestic politics of Arab Nationalism. How they balanced their concerns over those tendencies with their worry about Communism reflected the broader world calculus of the Eisenhower Administration in particular. In this region and with regard to Iraq, the focus on Communism as the primary challenge would lead to the conflation of the Arab Nationalist agenda with that of the USSR in the minds of several senior US policy makers, especially in the National Security Council. This was both mistaken and avoidable.

The US Reaction and Policy Response

It is fairly clear that early on the US failed to view Pan-Arab ideology as a serious threat to the Iraqi regime. Eventually US policy makers understood the threat posed by Nasser himself. The propaganda ploy by Voice of the Arabs noted above is an important example. That Nasser was a threat because his ideas were popular and nationalist in nature and thus salient across most Arab countries was somewhat lost on the Eisenhower administration until the new Iraqi regime made Nasser's nationalist ideas a centerpiece of their policy.

¹¹⁴ Marr, 158-160.

The nationalist tone of the revolt in 1958 led to a rapid readjustment of policy in the US. Widely quoted elsewhere in documents at the time, NSC 5801/1 includes the following important passage (errors in original):

Current conditions and political trends in the Near East are inimical to Western Interests. In the eyes of the majority of Arabs the United States appears to be opposed to the realization of the goals of Arab Nationalism. They believe that the United States is seeking to protect its interest in the Near east oil by supporting the status quo and opposing political or economic progress, and that the United States is intent upon maneuvering the Arab states into a position in which they will be committed to fight in a World War against the Soviet Union. The USSR, on the other hand, has managed successfully to represent itself to most Arabs as favoring the realization of the goals of Arab nationalism and as being willing to support the Arabs in their efforts to attain these goals without a quid pro quo

...¹¹⁵

Leaving aside some of the validity in the first part of that perception and the falsity of the second part, the United States government was keenly aware of its own vulnerability due to being opposed to Arab Nationalism at least at the present time. The Iraqi coup was believed by the National Security Council and the State Department to have resulted in

¹¹⁵ NSC 5801/1, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 20, January 24, 1958.

both significant practical setbacks for the United States and in broader support in the rest of the Middle East for the Iraqi government.¹¹⁶

Some of these same NSC documents make clear the reason for the hostility to Pan-Arab Nationalism on a geopolitical level by the Eisenhower Administration. Pan-Arab Nationalism called regularly for Palestine and Palestinian Arabs to be part of the envisioned union. This of course would have required the elimination of the state of Israel. The administration's judgment that any accommodation with Pan-Arabism would be unacceptable on these grounds is understandable, but it carried specific consequences. The same NSC memo that expressed concern over the Iraqi coup dismisses out-of-hand the thought of cooperating with Nasser to preserve mutual interests and develop new ones. This suggests a stance that had well-acknowledged consequences. Even after the 1958 coup, the Eisenhower administration and its advisors were willing to risk further alienation of Arab states and populations to protect Israel's interests or stymie perceived Soviet gains.¹¹⁷

Arab Nationalism as a nationalism of a broader sort had a more far-reaching consequence for the geopolitical alignment of most of the rest of the Middle East and of Iraq after the 1958 coup: the desire to achieve true independence from both East and West and foster good relations with both. Here the unilateral reaction of the United States to any warming of relations by Iraq or other nations to the Soviet Union and Soviet

¹¹⁶ "Issues Arising Out of the Situation in the Near East.", NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 20

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

economic aid was unequivocally negative, as “a strengthening of relations with the Soviet Union almost inevitably means a jeopardizing of relations with the United States.” Any connection of Arab Nationalism and even Nasser with the Soviet Union was at least in part forced upon the Arab League and the nationalists by the unyielding anti-communist policy.¹¹⁸ By 1959 the Eisenhower administration had concluded that the Arab Nationalist/Arab Socialist position had merged sufficiently with that of the USSR to make them indistinguishable as a matter of practice in the region. Only at this point, with NSC 5820/1 did the United States finally decide to start attempting to drive a wedge between the two ideologies.¹¹⁹

This is odd because the two ideologies were never allied to each other in any meaningful way. Nasser relied on the USSR primarily because the United States would not deal with him and because of its alliance to Britain, Egypt’s former quasi-colonial protector and participant in the mandate system. If anything, Pan-Arab Nationalism broadly and Pan-Arab Socialism in particular were not so much anti-capitalist philosophies as they were anti-communist. Despite searches through the appropriate collections in the Eisenhower Library and the State Department documentation widely available, it is not clear that this point was ever raised in discussion of the issue, nor that it occurred to any of the policy-makers or their advisors that the unilateralist policy, for-us-or-against-us stance taken by the United States was what was driving the bulk of the relationship between the Pan-Arab movements and Nasser on the one hand and the USSR

¹¹⁸ NSC 5801/1

¹¹⁹ NSC 5820/1 NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 23.

on the other. This failure to see the nuances of Pan-Arab Nationalism and to exploit its natural hostilities to Communism as materialist and godless was a major error.

Conclusions

From what is related above, it is clear that the policies of the United States with regard to Communism and its hostility to Arab Nationalism were key US policy failures. The unique position of Iraq in the region and its variety of security and political interests should have forced the Iraqi regime under Nuri to propose a third path somewhere between the overt cooperation with non-Arab powers embodied in the Baghdad Pact and the Pan-Arab position of full independence from the outside world and particularly the West. Pressure from the West made any such deliberation impractical. These conditions created or at the very least exacerbated the dynamics that resulted in the overthrow of the Iraqi regime, the temporary renaissance of Iraqi Communism, and the long-term loss of US interests in the region. Regardless of which set of values and interests were more important, it is fairly clear that American policymakers were or should have been aware of the impact their actions had on the Iraqi government. They are less responsible for the more unforeseeable consequences laid out in Chapter 1, such as the alliance of Marxist groups with Nationalists before the 1958 revolution, although these events were not totally unforeseeable.

It is clear that the trade-off was security for Israel and preventing Soviet southward expansion over the stability of the regimes and the aspirations of the broader Arab public. Given the quick collapse of the UAR true Arab nationalism might have effectively been impossible. However, the position of the United States against broader

unification or lesser intergovernmental cooperation only advanced the progress of other forces unfriendly to the United States. To the degree Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism became conflated with the Soviet Union, it was at least partly via the agency of the United States. Both the initial focus on Communism and a threatened Soviet invasion and the cycle of closer ties between the Arabs and the Soviets and thus greater suspicion on the part of the United States significantly checked American interests in the Gulf and greater Middle East during the Eisenhower years. In Iraq the results were both more dramatic and more severely problematic for future administrations.

CHAPTER FOUR: IRAQI-IRANIAN DIFFICULTIES AFTER 1958

As one might expect, the interactions between the US and Iran or Iraq were never so one-dimensional that the conversations and effects were limited to addressing the needs of the US and the concerns directly of the Eisenhower administration. The other issues internal or specific to both Iran and Iraq during this period have been discussed. The remaining complicating factor deserving of its own independent treatment is the change in Iraqi-Iranian relations after the 1958 coup that overthrew the Hashemite monarchy. In the Hashemites the shah of Iran had reliable and pragmatic partners and go-betweens who could assure him both that Iraq would never fully align with the rest of the Arab states into a nationalist, anti-Iranian bulwark nor fall victim to anything but the most direct of Soviet aggression. The period of instability in Iraq after this revolution and the response of the shah to the changes being made by all four of the successive Iraqi governments when combined with the shah's internal policies during this period no doubt also affected the eventual outcomes in the region. This section will document the reaction of the shah to the Iraqi revolution, the diplomatic response and policy line driven by Eisenhower and Herter in response, and evaluate what brought these responses about and what the end result of those responses was.

The first and perhaps most important thing to note about the Iraqi revolution is that it was proof that an unpopular regime in the region could fall due to combined popular and military pressure. As the Iraqi regime had been perceived just a few months earlier as the most stable in the Middle East, this proved to the shah that his regime was

even more vulnerable. If even the most sober analysis of the National Security Council is to be believed, the shah essentially panicked. Some of this was justified. An annual national security analysis dated May 8, 1958 references the difficulty of predicting the shah's future actions. Domestically he had begun indiscriminate arrests of dissidents in the previous twelve months, justified retroactively because of the Iraqi revolution and an assassination plot in January by a high-ranking military official that his security forces interrupted at an early stage. The shah also doubted that the US could prevent the spread of Soviet influence, and attributed this directly to the new leader in Iraq, Qasim, whom the shah felt was too friendly to the Soviets. In response, he demanded dramatic increases in US military aid and suspension of all aid to other former Baghdad Pact countries, fearing they too were vulnerable to overthrow.¹²⁰ Although the shah no doubt had significant insight into broader Soviet influence and had raised concerns that a coup in Iraq was more likely than either the Nuri regime or Eisenhower administration would have liked to think, his actions before and directly after were a significant overreach.

In the section on Iraq it was noted that the US did stop supplying aid to Iraq almost immediately after the coup d'état, but otherwise these last two demands were seen as totally unreasonable. Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan and Iran itself all received military and development aid through the Baghdad Pact, and all except Jordan had different but real levels of vulnerability to direct Soviet military incursion. In the case of Jordan, a combination of Nasserite pan-Arabic feeling and a Hashemite monarch made the nation

¹²⁰ *OCB Report on Iran [NSC 5703/1]*, WHITE HOUSE OFFICE, OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS: Records, 1952-61, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries Box 11, May 5, 1958.

vulnerable. Repeated reassurance by President Eisenhower, Secretary Herter, and the embassy staff in Tehran did nothing to calm the shah's fears. In August 1959, the shah wrote a letter to Eisenhower complaining of Soviet interference in Iran, collusion by the Iraqi regime with the meddling, increasing hostility directly between Iraq and Iran, and his fears of an imminent war in the Middle East. The shah further claimed that Iran would not be able to survive an invasion by other Middle Eastern states, even if the USSR did not get directly involved. "Would it not be a thousand pities if a country such as mine, at present enjoying stability and security determined to defend its independence and integrity, anxious to promote the prosperity and progress of its people, and confident of a brilliant future, were to fall the prey of international communism by virtue of the neglect of its most urgent and immediate needs?"¹²¹

Such is the tenor of all correspondence from the Shah to the American government during this time period. In his accompanying cable to this letter, Ambassador Edward Wales, agreed that this was the perspective and policy position of the Iranian government, but included a progress report on training and security upgrades that were taking place at that very moment in a hope to counterbalance any potential Iraqi threat. The ambassador believed that the shah intended to take advantage of a meeting between Eisenhower and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to secure more military aid. The ambassador encouraged the President to pass on concerns about radio interference to Premier Khrushchev and asked for a progress report on the 1960 foreign aid

¹²¹ "Letter from Shah of Iran to President Eisenhower dated August 16, 1959." Department of State, Papers of Secretary of State Herter, Box 8, Reference number 344, August 17, 1959, 11AM.

appropriation, but otherwise cautioned the president and secretary not to take any special action.¹²²

It is difficult to have complete confidence when extrapolating the motives and thoughts of a leader even from the most robust documentation, but the letters to President Eisenhower and the accounts of his and his government's conversations with embassy staff all make similar claims. There are three possible conclusions that can be drawn from this evidence. First, one might conclude that the shah of Iran feared that instability in Iraq could foreshadow domestic weakness in his own regime. Second, the shah might have feared an actual communist takeover in Iraq. Finally, he might have seen Iraq as a potent foe on a different level: either as a rival claimant to speak for Shiite Islam or as an ally of Nasser in pan-Arab socialism. The Eisenhower administration shared these first two fears, and the shah did as much as he could to emphasize these possibilities, but it is just as likely that the shah was foremost concerned with his regional position.

Iran was in a uniquely strong position after World War II. There was no transition from colonial or occupation government and the shah's regime or one like it had existed in Iran for almost two millennia. The shah's secularization and modernization programs had made Iran's position as the sole real power among Shiite Islamic states and peoples less relevant geopolitically, but one needs only look as far back as the Mossadeq government to find that religious parties and identity were still important to the masses. No doubt either prolonged chaos involving Arab Sunnis or a

¹²² "Letter from Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State," Department of State, Papers of Secretary of State Herter, Box 8, Reference number 359. August 19, 1959, Noon.

consolidation of Iraq behind a rival Shiite leader or Nasser would have been a major blow to the shah's already faltering legitimacy, which could not sustain another crisis or survive another period of internal revolt or political unrest even at this stage. His promises of Westernization and democracy had proven hollow. The shah rightly feared that a rival of the caliber of Nasser would pose a direct threat to his claim to speak for a more secular yet still devout Shiite Muslim population.

To say that these were not primary concerns of the US government would be an understatement. After the overthrow of the monarchy, the Eisenhower administration's stated goals were much more cautious and its language in response to the Iranian reaction much more measured. The next National Security Council report on the region cited friendly elements within the Iraqi regime, encouraged renewal of technical and humanitarian aid as quickly as possible, and encouraged acceptance of Iraqi withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact.¹²³ Military aid for Iraq in the four years before the coup had amounted to more than \$58.5 million. Only \$59,000 to complete the training of Iraqi military officers who had started their advanced training in the US before the coup was disbursed in Fiscal Year 1959.¹²⁴ This was a massive blow to Iraqi preparedness and military training, as intended. The administration then conditioned the receipt of the \$11.9 million due in FY 1960 and 1961 on proving themselves to be a workable, pro-western partner. That this was not enough for the shah hamstrung US policy somewhat.

¹²³ NSC 5820/1 "Statement of US Policy Toward The Near East" NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 23, page 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

The shah's insistence that Iraq's funds be permanently cut unless it rejoined the Baghdad Pact might have contributed to the instability of regimes in Iraq over the next decade.

Whatever the difficulties imposed by the shah and his fear of a hostile Iraqi government leaving his regime vulnerable to attack or revolt, the US government's choice to cater to his punitive demands to prove its support of his regime instead of fostering its stated goal of modernization and democratization in other Middle Eastern countries was a clear policy error.¹²⁵ The result would be more instability and stronger Iraqi-Soviet relations over the short term, the rise of Baathism and sustaining of Arab Nationalist and Arab Socialist momentum in the medium term, and the eventual destabilization of the Shah's own regime in the long term. There was a consensus of policy-makers on the ground as well as the national security establishment that these goals were the only way to prevent both Soviet expansion and reduce those aspects of Arab Nationalism and Islamization most inimical to Western interests, and therefore the decision was made to support broadly the Shah and wait for a more friendly Iraqi government before acting. In retrospect, that consensus was short-sighted.

¹²⁵ See Section 1.

CONCLUSION: EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION POLICY IN PERSPECTIVE

As noted before, the Eisenhower administration's objectives of preventing any rooting of communist thought or Soviet military power in the broader Middle East was largely accomplished, in no small part due to the strong regional alliances formed in the region and proactive undercutting of the base of communist support. These were not insignificant victories in an era of ever-expanding Soviet interference and power. However, this narrow focus on the USSR would weaken American interests in the region, and in particular in Iraq and Iran, especially in the long-term.

It is easy to over-generalize or not to judge the administration too harshly. By all accounts the hostility of Soviet leadership and the ideology of the Soviet Union were direct threats to many of the long-established American and Western economic, military, and political interests in the region. However, broadly speaking, there were few areas of the world less likely to fall to a full-on communist takeover, at least from within, than Iraq or Iran.

Neither the ICP nor Tudeh, in any of their incarnations, believed that revolution was likely to come quickly in their homelands. The nations were not industrialized, not modern in any sense that Marx, Lenin, or any other socialist master-ideologist would have recognized, and highly fractured on ethnic and religious lines. Both the ICP and Tudeh wanted agrarian reform, modest social-democratic redistributive economies like those then developing in Western Europe, and broader democratic political reform, all in the belief that moving toward a more just Western system would lessen the suffering of

the rural and urban populations alike and would set the stage for a far-distant revolution. Although the end-goal of revolution along Marxist or Leninist lines was drastically different, until appropriate development was achieved, the Iraqi and Iranian communist leadership, such as it was, desired marginal change, and agreed on short term goals with the West far more often than not. They were also far too weak to provoke any sort of revolution had they so desired.

The groups that were strongest in post-War Iraq and Iran were the nationalist parties. Because these parties were, like the communists, stridently opposed to the existing regimes, many of the actions taken against communism by both the Iraqi and Iranian governments of the decade also were taken against them. As discussed in Chapter Three, Arab Nationalism broadly and Nasserite Arab Socialism were particular problems for the Iraqi regime. Though at their surface employing similar rhetoric, Marxism-Leninism and Nasserism were diametrically opposed ideologies, and the relative lack of available documentation showing an understanding of this by the Administration is disappointing.

In the end, the political repression and Westernization programs undertaken by the Iranian regime under Reza Shah Pahlavi and in Iraq under Faisal II, the crown Prince, and Nuri al-Said led to the elevation of other strains of resistance to the West. Economic retrenchment by British and American interests smacked of neo-colonialism, and the response was further increases in nationalist feeling. The resulting 1958 coup in Iraq was the most dramatic in a line of missed signals. In aligning militarily and economically with the West while allowing no real Western-style institutions to take root, Nuri and the shah initiated chains of events that eventually led to the Ba'ath party takeover in Iraq and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, both on largely nationalist, anti-Western terms.

In this way, the Eisenhower administration is not unique. During the rest of the Cold War and beyond, the United States would support pro-Western anti-democratic regimes over more democratic systems that had any chance of resulting in anything resembling socialism. The main distinguishing factors in the Middle East more broadly and Iraq and Iran in particular are the relatively low quantity of historical analysis of US involvement in this area during the period, the complete public lack of public knowledge as regards these policies as compared to Eastern Europe or East Asia, and the horrible long-term consequences for US-based interests.

It remains the case, however, that the policies pursued by the Eisenhower administration were poorly-constructed and damaging. It is not likely that either the Iraqi or the Iranian regime could have survived in any case, but had Western and US interests and the Eisenhower administration in particular supported for more democratic reform along with economic modernization and been less hostile to Nasser, a more friendly Middle East would have at least been possible.

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