

OPERATION AJAX: CIA, MUHAMMAD MOSSADEQ, AND THE SHAH OF IRAN

Operation Ajax, in short, was when the CIA overthrew Muhammad Mossadeq's democratic government in 1953 and reinstated the Shah to the throne of Iran. In 1951, a British company (AIOC) had control of Iran's oil fields. The Iranian people believed that their deal with the AIOC was unfairly benefitting the company and a political controversy ensued. A man named Muhammad Mossadeq, a member of Iranian parliament, demanded a renegotiation of the standing agreement and the Iranian people were quick to rally behind him and make him their honored leader. The previously ineffective parliament then became the primary government in the area, leaving the Shah, who had ruled as an authoritarian monarch powerless. Since Mossadeq was backed by the majority of the people in Iran, it appeared to be Iran's first democratically elected leader.

However, the new government only meant trouble for the United States. In 1953, there was a boycott of Iranian oil, their oil revenues decreased, and the economy declined. There were also several problems stemming from Mossadeq's rule. He was the "driving force behind an Iranian attempt to nationalize" Britain's oil company, the AIOC. Also, having been extremely independent, he refused to work with the requests of the United States and many became afraid that he would join forces with America's enemy, the Soviet Union.

As a result, the CIA staged a coup d'etat in Iran, headed by President Theodore Roosevelt's grandson, Kermit Roosevelt. The purpose was to return the Shah to power through CIA engineered protests and bribery of Iranian officers. The first phase was unsuccessful and the Shah fled Tehran, fearful that his life was in danger for his participation in the attempted overthrow of Massadeq. The second phase was more successful, and enabled the Shah to victoriously return to Iran where he then had a 25-year dictatorship supported by the United States. However, this ruling also came with the Savak, a brutal and terrifying police force that angered many Iranians and ignited hatred towards the Americans. Although the people of Iran suspected CIA involvement, the U.S. government kept the coup d'etat a secret from the American people. Operation Ajax was considered a resounding success until 1979, when the Iranians revolted against the U.S. Embassy in what became known as the Iranian Hostage Crisis.