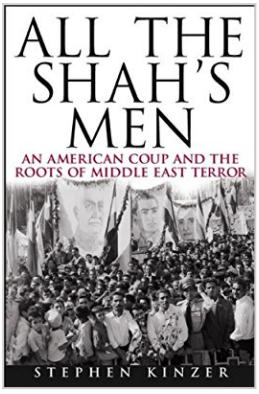

All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror

By Stephen Kinzer

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This is the first full-length account of the CIA's coup d'etat in Iran in 1953—a covert operation whose consequences are still with us today. Written by a noted New York Times journalist, this book is based on documents about the coup (including some lengthy internal CIA reports) that have now been declassified. Stephen Kinzer's compelling narrative is at once a vital piece of history, a cautionary tale, and a real-life espionage thriller.

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All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror By Stephen Kinzer Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #600055 in Books
- Published on: 2003-07-18
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.63" h x .96" w x 6.38" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 272 pages

Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
With breezy storytelling and diligent research, Kinzer has reconstructed the CIA's 1953 overthrow of the elected leader of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh, who was wildly popular at home for having nationalized his country's oil industry. The coup ushered in the long and brutal dictatorship of Mohammad Reza Shah, widely seen as a U.S. puppet and himself overthrown by the Islamic revolution of 1979. At its best this work reads like a spy novel, with code names and informants, midnight meetings with the monarch and a last-minute plot twist when the CIA's plan, called Operation Ajax, nearly goes awry. A veteran New York Times foreign correspondent and the author of books on Nicaragua (Blood of Brothers) and Turkey (Crescent and Star), Kinzer has combed memoirs, academic works, government documents and news stories to produce this blow-by-blow account. He shows that until early in 1953, Great Britain and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company were the imperialist baddies of this tale. Intransigent in the face of Iran's demands for a fairer share of oil profits and better conditions for workers, British Foreign Secretary Herbert Morrison exacerbated tension with his attitude that the challenge from Iran was, in Kinzer's words, "a simple matter of ignorant natives rebelling against the forces of civilization." Before the crisis peaked, a high-ranking employee of Anglo-Iranian wrote to a superior that the company's alliance with the "corrupt ruling classes" and "leech-like bureaucracies" were "disastrous, outdated and impractical." This stands as a textbook lesson in how not to conduct foreign policy.

Review
”…meticulously documented throughout…essential reading…” (*Medicine Conflict and Survival*, Vol. 21(4) October 2005)

That the past is prolog is especially true in this astonishing account of the 1953 overthrow of nationalist Iranian leader Mohammed Mossadegh, who became prime minister in 1951 and immediately nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This act angered the British, who sought assistance from the United States in overthrowing Mossedegh's fledgling democracy. Kermit Roosevelt, Teddy's grandson, led the successful coup in August 1953, which ended in the reestablishment of the Iranian monarchy in the person of Mohammad Reza Shah. Iranian anger at this foreign intrusion smoldered until the 1979 revolution. Meanwhile, over the next decade, the United States successfully overthrew other governments, such as that of Guatemala. Kinzer, a *New York Times* correspondent who has also written about the 1954 Guatemala coup (*Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*), tells his captivating tale with style and verve. This book leads one to wonder how many of our contemporary problems in the Middle East may have resulted from this covert CIA adventure. Recommended for all collections. —Ed Goedeken, Iowa S tate Univ. Lib., Ames (*Library Journal*, June 15, 2003)

"...He does so with a keen journalistic eye, and with a novelist's pen...In what is a very gripping read." (*The New York Times*, July 23, 2003)

Tell people today that the United Nations was once the center of the world—the place where struggling nations got a shot at a fair hearing instead of a monkey trial before they were overthrown—and most would probably shake their heads in puzzlement.
Yet it was at the U.N., in October 1953, that one of the greatest dramas of the nascent television age unfolded: The eccentric, hawk-nosed Iranian nationalist leader Mohammed Mossadegh squared off with the

aristocratic ambassador of the fading British Empire. At stake was Britain's claim to own Iran's oil in perpetuity.

The press played the showdown like a prize fight, "the tremulous, crotchety Premier versus Britain's super-suave representative, Sir Gladwyn Jebb," in Newsweek's account. The Daily News groused, "Whether Mossy is a phony or a genuine tear-jerker, he better put everything he's got into his show if he goes on television here." Time magazine had made him its Man of the Year. Now came "the decisive act in the dramatic, tragic and sometimes ridiculous drama that began when Iran nationalized the Anglo-American Oil Co. five months ago."

Five centuries ago would be more accurate, in the eyes of veteran New York Times correspondent Stephen Kinzer, who has written an entirely engrossing, often riveting, nearly Homeric tale, which, if life were fair, would be this summer's beach book. For anyone with more than a passing interest in how the United States got into such a pickle in the Middle East, *All the Shah's Men* is as good as Grisham.

And what a character Mossadegh makes: a fiery, French-educated nationalist with wild eyes, a high patrician forehead and droopy cheeks. His legendary hypochondria—he was prone to fainting and constantly received even diplomatic visitors in bed—seemed to flow from some deep wellspring of Shi'ite martyrdom, Kinzer suggests.

But the author's real accomplishment is his suspenseful account of Persia's centuries-old military, political, cultural and religious heritage, in which Mossadegh's face-off with London comes as the stirring climax to a drama that began with "Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, titans whose names still echo through history." By the 1930s, most Iranians had come to regard the abject misery they plunged into with every passing decade of exclusive British control of their one great natural asset as another passing calamity in a long history of the same. But with the global stirring of post-World War II nationalism, Anglo-American Oil pushed them to the breaking point.

In 1947, for example, the company reported an after-tax profit of £40 million—the equivalent of $112 million—and gave Iran just £7 million," Kinzer writes. Meanwhile, the company ignored a 1933 agreement to pay laborers more than 50 cents a day, or to build "the schools, hospitals, roads, or telephone system it promised." Inevitably, riots began breaking out at Abadan, the oil city where hundreds of thousands of Iranians lived amid baked mud and sewage in cardboard hovels in shadeless, searing heat. Their British overseers lived in another world entirely—tending to their green lawns and gardens, watching their well-scrubbed children frolic in the fountains, attending air-conditioned, "no-wogs-allowed" movie theaters, and sipping gin and tonics in their private clubs. The Abadan riots also propelled the fiery Mossadegh to his rendevous with destiny. But although the Iranian leader held his audience at the United Nations Security Council with a moving explication of his country's destitution at the hands of Anglo-Iranian interests, his triumph proved short-lived—and was soon to become a bittersweet memory.

In 1953, President Harry S Truman, whose gut-level sympathy for the impoverished Iranians led him to rebuff British pleas to conspire in Mossadegh's removal, was gone. The incoming Republicans were much more favorably disposed toward the British, especially after Whitehall repackaged its pitch in terms of a communist threat: Iran would fall to the Soviets, they now said, if Mossadegh stayed in office. Within weeks, the Eisenhower administration was plotting to get rid of him.

After all this drama, the machinations of CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt in Teheran to bring down Mossadegh and replace him with the young Reza Shah Pahlevi seems almost like an epilogue. For connoisseurs of covert action, however, there's a hell of a story left, even if some of it will make even the hardest-bitten Cold Warrior wince.

The basic facts of Operation Ajax have been known for some time, in part from "Kim" Roosevelt's own memoir, in part from other sources, most notably a windfall of long-classified CIA documents leaked to Kinzer's New York Times colleague James Risen in 2000.

The author makes good use of the material, toggling his drama between Washington, where CIA desk officers furiously churned out material for bought-off Iranian newspapers and radio stations, to Teheran, where Roosevelt scurried among clandestine meetings with Reza Pahlevi—a man so timorous he flew to

Baghdad when the plot seemed to unravel—as well as with various treasonous Iranian Army officers.
Ajax was a triumph in the eyes of many—especially, needless to say, in the CIA. That verdict, of course, discounts the whirlwind of 1979, when the Shah was overthrown by furious Shi'ite mobs whipped up by the Ayatollah Khomeini, who quickly spawned the terrorists of Hezbollah and other groups who plague us today.
"We got 25 years out of the Shah—that's not so bad," a CIA man once said to me, stirring a drink with his finger. As always, the Iranians had a different view. —Jeff Stein is co-author of "Saddam's Bombmaker" and editor of *Congressional Quarterly's Homeland Security*, a daily news Web site. (*The Washington Post*, Sunday, August 3, 2003)

On Aug. 15, 1953, a. group of anxious C.I.A. officers huddled in a safe house in Tehran, sloshing down vodka, singing Broadway songs and waiting to hear whether they'd made history. Their favorite tune, "Luck Be a Lady Tonight," became the unofficial anthem of Operation Ajax - the American plot to oust Iran's nationalist prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, and place the country firmly in the authoritarian hands of Mohammed Reza Shah.
In fact, luck was not much of a lady that night; as Stephen Kinzer's lively popular history of the 1953 coup recounts, Mossadegh's chief of staff got word of the conspiracy and rushed troops to defend the prime minister, thereby panicking the feckless young shah into fleeing to Baghdad and plunging the carousing Central Intelligence agents into gloom. The coup succeeded four tense days later, only after a C.I.A.-incited mob (led by a giant thug known memorably as Shaban the Brainless) swept Mossadegh aside. Luck was even less kind to the Ajax plotters in the longer haul; in 1979, the despotic shah fell to Islamist revolutionaries bristling with anti-American resentment.
Even the president who approved the coup, Dwight Eisenhower, later described it as seeming "more like a dime novel than an historical fact." Sure enough, "All the Shah's Men" reads more like a swashbuckling yarn than a scholarly opus. Still, Kinzer, a New York Times correspondent now based in Chicago, offers a helpful reminder of an oft-neglected piece of Middle Eastern history, drawn in part from a recently revealed secret C.I.A. history.
The book's hero is the enigmatic Mossadegh himself. In his day, British newspapers likened Mossadegh to Robespierre and Frankenstein's monster, while The New York Times compared him to Jefferson and Paine. Kinzer full-throatedly takes the latter view, seeing Mossadegh's achievements as "profound and even earth-shattering." But he acknowledges that the great Iranian nationalist was also an oddball: a prima donna, prone to hypochondria, ulcers and fits, who met the urbane American diplomat Averell Harriman while lying in bed in pink pajamas and a camel-hair cloak.
Mossadegh's Iran faced formidable foes: British oil executives, the C.I.A. and the brothers Dulles, all of whom come off wretchedly here. The least sympathetic of all are Iran's erstwhile British rulers, who continued to gouge Iran via the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. When the Truman administration prodded it to share the wealth with Iran, its chairman sniffed, "One penny more and the company goes broke." In 1951, to London's fury, Mossadegh led a successful campaign to nationalize the oil company, drove the British to close their vital oil refinery at Abadan and became prime minister. The British began drafting invasion plans, but Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson warned them ...

From the Inside Flap
Half a century ago, the United States overthrew a Middle Eastern government for the first time. The victim was Mohammad Mossadegh, the democratically elected prime minister of Iran. Although the coup seemed a success at first, today it serves as a chilling lesson about the dangers of foreign intervention.

In this book, veteran New York Times correspondent Stephen Kinzer gives the first full account of this fateful operation. His account is centered around an hour-by-hour reconstruction of the events of August 1953, and concludes with an assessment of the coup’s "haunting and terrible legacy."

Operation Ajax, as the plot was code-named, reshaped the history of Iran, the Middle East, and the world. It restored Mohammad Reza Shah to the Peacock Throne, allowing him to impose a tyranny that ultimately sparked the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Islamic Revolution, in turn, inspired fundamentalists throughout the Muslim world, including the Taliban and terrorists who thrived under its protection.

"It is not far-fetched," Kinzer asserts in this book, "to draw a line from Operation Ajax through the Shah's repressive regime and the Islamic Revolution to the fireballs that engulfed the World Trade Center in New York."

Drawing on research in the United States and Iran, and using material from a long-secret CIA report, Kinzer explains the background of the coup and tells how it was carried out. It is a cloak-and-dagger story of spies, saboteurs, and secret agents. There are accounts of bribes, staged riots, suitcases full of cash, and midnight meetings between the Shah and CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt, who was smuggled in and out of the royal palace under a blanket in the back seat of a car. Roosevelt, the grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, was a real-life James Bond in an era when CIA agents operated mainly by their wits. After his first coup attempt failed, he organized a second attempt that succeeded three days later.

The colorful cast of characters includes the terrified young Shah, who fled his country at the first sign of trouble; General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, father of the Gulf War commander and the radio voice of "Gang Busters," who flew to Tehran on a secret mission that helped set the coup in motion; and the fiery Prime Minister Mossadegh, who outraged the West by nationalizing the immensely profitable Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The British, outraged by the seizure of their oil company, persuaded President Dwight Eisenhower that Mossadegh was leading Iran toward Communism. Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain became the coup's main sponsors.

Brimming with insights into Middle Eastern history and American foreign policy, this book is an eye-opening look at an event whose unintended consequences–Islamic revolution and violent anti-Americanism–have shaped the modern world. As the United States assumes an ever-widening role in the Middle East, it is essential reading.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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