

VII. APPARENT FAILURE

At 0545 hours on the morning of 16 August 1953, Radio Tehran came on the air with a special government communique covering the so-called abortive coup of the night just ending, and by 0600 hours Mossadeq was meeting with his cabinet to receive reports on the situation and to take steps to strengthen the security forces at government buildings and other vital points. Again at 0730 hours the communique was broadcast.

Station personnel had passed an anxious, sleepless night in their office. From the fact that certain actions provided for in the military plan failed to materialize--no jeep with radio arrived at the compound, and the telephone system continued to function--it was obvious that something--or everything--had gone wrong. At 0500 hours, as soon as the curfew was lifted, Carroll toured the town and reported there was a concentration of tanks and troops around Mossadeq's house, and other security forces on the move. Then Colonel                      called the office to say that things had gone badly, and that he, himself, was on the run toward the Embassy in search of refuge. At 0600 hours he appeared, gave a summary of the situation, which was like that of the government communique, and was rushed

into hiding. The station was now suddenly faced with the task of rescuing the operation from total failure, and decisions of far-reaching effect were quickly taken. The first need was to establish contact with Ardeshir Zahedi, son of General Zahedi. At 0800 hours he sent word to the station of his whereabouts, and Roosevelt drove up to Shimran--the summer resort section north of Tehran--to hear that Ardeshir and his father felt that there was still hope in the situation. It was immediately decided that a strong effort must be made to convince the Iranian public that Zahedi was the legal head of the government and that Mossadeq was the usurper who had staged a coup. (It should be noted that all action taken from this time on corresponded to the basic estimate of the operational plan that the army would respond to the Shah if they were forced to a choice between the ruler and Mossadeq.) This action was initiated by employing station communications facilities to relay a message to the New York Associated Press (AP) office stating that: "Unofficial reports are current to the effect that leaders of the plot are armed with two decrees of the Shah, one dismissing Mossadeq and the other appointing General Zahedi to replace him." In order to get an authoritative statement that could be distributed for local consumption, the station planned to send General McClure, head of the American

Military Mission, to see the Shah and ask him whether the alleged firmans were valid. Later in the day it was learned that the Shah had fled.

By 0930 hours the city was calm, with shops opening and people going about their normal business. However, tanks, extra soldiers, and police were stationed at key points, including the royal palaces which were sealed off from outside contact. Rumors began to circulate. The one that gained early attention was to the effect that the alleged coup had been inspired by the government in order to give Mossadeq an excuse to move against the Shah. At about this time Roosevelt sent General McClure to see General Riahi, Chief of Staff, to ask whether the US Military Mission was still accredited to Mossadeq or to someone else, as the Embassy had heard that an imperial firman had been issued naming Zahedi as Prime Minister. Riahi denied that the firman had been "authentically signed" and stated that: "Iran and its people are more important than the Shah or any particular government," and that the army was "of the people and would support the people." It was not until a number of hours later that McClure reported to Roosevelt on this meeting, and from the time of the meeting on, McClure seemed disposed to go along with Riahi in the hope that Riahi himself might eventually try to overthrow Mossadeq.

It was now well into the morning, after the papers had been out for some time. Shojat, the substitute for the principal Tudeh paper, Besuye Ayandeh, had been predicting a coup since 13 August. It now stated that the plans for the alleged coup had been made after a meeting between the Shah and General Schwarzkopf on 9 August, but that Mossadeq had been tipped off on the 14th. It should be noted that the Tudeh appeared to be at least as well posted on the coup plans as the government--how is not known. The station principal agent team of \_\_\_\_\_, working on their own and with singular shrewdness, had put out a special broadsheet which documented the current rumor but twisted it to read that the alleged coup was arranged to force out the Shah. The morning issue of Mellat-i-Ma told this same story, while a first mention of the firman naming Zahedi was given on an inner page of the large circulation daily Keyhan.

At 1000 hours another communique added a few details to the earlier one. By this time the Tudeh Party members, organized in small groups, were making speeches in many parts of the city, while smaller groups of pro-Mossadeq nationalists were also out in the streets. Then a fresh rumor made the rounds: that a plot had existed but that, when it had failed to materialize, Mossadeq had staged a fake coup. At 1100 hours two correspondents of the New

York Times were taken to Shimran, by station arrangement, to see Zahedi. Instead, they saw his son, Ardeshir, who showed them the original of the imperial firman naming Zahedi as Prime Minister and gave them photostatic copies. These photostats had been made by Iranian participants in the plan. Following this meeting the station took charge of the firman, had its own photostats made, and kept the original locked up in the station safe until final victory. At noon Radio Tehran put out a very brief statement signed by Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq (without his title of Prime Minister being used) stating that: "According to the will of the people, expressed by referendum, the 17th Majlis is dissolved. Elections for the 18th session will be held soon." It was this statement, together with the following violently anti-Shah remarks of Fatemi and the undisguised and freely-preached republican propaganda of the Tudeh Party, that was instrumental in persuading the general public that Mossadeq was on the verge of eliminating the monarchy.

At 1400 hours Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatemi held a press conference. He stated that for some time past the government had received reports from several sources to the effect that the Imperial Guards were planning a coup and, hence, measures were taken to counteract any such coup. He then went on to review the incidents of the coup, as already

stated by the government communiques. In reply to a question, he said that Abul Ghassem Amini, Acting Minister of Court, had been arrested since it could not be considered that the court was not a part of the conspiracy. He added that his own views would be found in his editorial in Bakhtar Emruz: this editorial, as printed and as read in full, over Radio Tehran at 1730 hours, was a savage, lengthy, malicious attack upon the Shah and upon Reza Shah--a man for whom the general public still feels a large measure of respect and awe. It may be said that this editorial did a great deal to arouse public resentment against the government of Mossadeq.

During the afternoon the station was at work preparing a public statement from General Zahedi which was prepared with the direct advice of Ardeshir Zahedi, the Rashidian brothers, and Colonel . When it was ready the agents were unable to find a press in town which was not watched by the government. Therefore, one of the Rashidians did ten copies on a Persian typewriter. These were rushed to General Zahedi for his signature and then given out to the foreign correspondents, to local pressmen and to two key army officers. By the time they were distributed, it was too late to catch the press for the morning of the 17th. However, station agents, , although not



in touch with the station, the Rashidians, or went ahead on their own. They composed a fabricated interview with Zahedi and had it printed on the 17th, along with a copy of the firman. In this instance, as in a number of others, the high-level agents of the station demonstrated a most satisfying ability to go ahead on their own and do just the right thing. During the day the station was securing the persons of key individuals and sending them to safety. Some were concealed in the house of a station clerk in the Embassy compound and some in the houses of US personnel of the station outside the compound. Thus, Ardeshir Zahedi was in station hands from the morning of the 16th on, General Zahedi from the morning of the 17th on, the Rashidian brothers from the 16th on with the exception of a venture out on the 18th, Colonel [redacted] from the morning of the 16th on, and General [redacted] from the morning of the 16th. These people had to be concealed by the station, both in order to secure them from arrest and also to have them in places to which Americans could logically and easily go.

That evening about 1930 hours crowds massed in the Majlis Square to hear speeches, and the proceedings were rebroadcast over Radio Tehran. The speakers included pro-Mossadeq ex-Majlis deputies Mosavi, Dr. Šzyyid Ali Shayegan, Engineer Zirakzadeh, Engineer Razavi, and Foreign Minister

Fatemi. All the speakers attacked the Shah and demanded that he abdicate. During the course of these speeches, the public was informed for the first time that the Shah had fled to Baghdad. The station had learned several hours earlier that the Shah had left. By 1600 hours the two principal US Embassy political officers had given up hope, while Roosevelt was insisting there was still a "slight remaining chance of success" if the Shah would use the Baghdad radio and if Zahedi took an aggressive stand. Additional station messages to Headquarters contained the texts of the type of statements the Shah could make over Baghdad radio.

Allowing for the seven hour difference in time, Headquarters received the first message from the station on the non-success of the coup at 0130 hours on the 16th, and a few hours thereafter was working on the station's request to get the Shah to broadcast from Baghdad. As the working day ended, they had to report to the station that the State Department was firmly opposed to any American effort to contact the Shah and suggested the British do it. At Nicosia they responded enthusiastically to the station's suggestion, and the SIS attempted to get permission from London to have Leavitt and Darbyshire flown to Baghdad by RAF jet fighter early in the morning of the 17th, for the



purpose of exerting pressure on the Shah. London refused permission.

As the station personnel entered on another day after a second sleepless night, some real encouragement came from word that, in breaking up Tudeh groups late the night before, the soldiers had beaten them with rifle butts and made them shout, "Long live the Shah." The station continued to feel that the "project was not quite dead" since General Zahedi, General \_\_\_\_\_, the Rashidian brothers, and Colonel \_\_\_\_\_ were still determined to press action.

Now, on the morning of 17 August, the press was again on the streets. Niruye Sevum stated that Schwarzkopf engineered the plot with the Shah and that "simple-minded Americans thought the Shah was a trump card." Dad and Shahed both blamed the so-called coup on the government, and Keyhan carried the text of an alleged Radio London statement quoting Zahedi to the effect that he had a firman from the Shah and that the Shah had left because his life was threatened. Throughout the morning Iranians with good radios were able to get word from foreign stations of statements that the Shah had made in Baghdad. He said: "What has taken place in Iran cannot be considered a coup d'etat in the real sense." The Shah said he had issued his orders for the dismissal of Dr. Mossadeq under the prerogatives given to him by the

constitution, and had appointed General Zahedi in his place. He went on to say that he had not abdicated and that he was confident of the loyalty of the Iranian people to him. This line was what the station had in mind, if less strong than desired; and the Baghdad papers hinted that painful, bloody events were still to come in Iran. The station suggested that Imam Khalasi, religious divine at Baghdad, and the Agha Khan be enlisted to give the Shah moral backing, while Headquarters, on State Department instructions, continued to refuse permission for direct US contact with the Shah. In the meantime the US Ambassador to Iraq, Burton Berry, reported on his conversation with the Shah on the evening of the 16th. His statements, made on his own initiative, were quite in line with suggestions reaching him after the event.

About 1000 hours a considerable body of the troops that had been dispersed throughout the city were called back to their barracks, as the government was certain the situation was well in hand. At 1030 hours Radio Tehran called upon General Zahedi to surrender to the authorities, and then began broadcasting lists of those arrested as having taken part in the abortive coup or having had some connection with those events. The separate lists, including those of the next day, contained the following names

(those underlined indicate the individuals who were known to the station to be engaged in the coup attempt):

Rumors circulated to the effect that the arrested officers were to be hanged on 30 August, and throughout the unit commands of the Tehran garrison, the police, and the gendarmerie, officers met to discuss the situation. Several of them resolved to risk all to attempt to rescue their friends.

The station devoted a great deal of effort during the day to circulating photostatic copies of the firman--particularly among the army--and in trying to arrange for more and more press coverage. It was now obvious that public knowledge of the existence of the firmans was having an effect. Everyone was asking questions: "Was it true that the Shah had issued firmans? If so, why was Mossadeq lying about it? Wasn't that a most reprehensible thing to do?"

At 1325 hours Fatemi held a press conference at which he dealt with the flight of the Shah to Iraq, read the abjectly pleading letter from arrested Acting Minister of Court Amini, and stated that 14 officers had been arrested. His more detailed views on the current situation were expressed in an editorial in Bakhtar Emruz and were in the main a repetition of his previous scurrilous attacks against the Shah. He wrote such words as, "O traitor Shah, you shameless person, you have completed the criminal history of the Pahlevi reign. The people...want to drag you from behind your desk to the gallows."

Early in the afternoon, Ambassador Henderson arrived in Tehran from Beirut. On the way out to the airport to meet him, members of the Embassy passed the site of the bronze statue of Reza Shah at the end of the avenue of

that name. Only the boots of the figure remained on the pedestal. A passing truck was dragging behind it the horse from the equestrian statue of the same ruler that had stood in Sepah Square. In the crowds engaged in this activity, the Tudeh were obviously in the majority.

On behalf of the government, Henderson was welcomed by Dr. Gholam Hosein Mossadeq, son of the Prime Minister, and by Dr. Aleml, Minister of Labor. At 1630 hours the station sent off a cable giving a general survey of the local situation which, although it foresaw Mossadeq's position strengthened for the next few weeks, did insist that a policy of opposition to him be continued. Near the end of the afternoon, the government used the voice of a religious leader, Sadr Balaghi, to attack the Shah over Radio Tehran.

The evening was a most active and trying time for the station. Principal agents were reached and given instructions. Within the Embassy compound, Roosevelt and Carroll held a prolonged council of war with the heads of their team: General Zahedi and Ardeshir Zahedi, General , the three Rashidian brothers, and Colonel . These teammates were, when required, smuggled in and out of the compound in the bottom of cars and in closed jeeps. A few hundred yards away /

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Ambassador Henderson and General McClure were out in the garden in front of the residency, and Roosevelt wore a path back and forth to reassure them that no Persians were hidden out in the compound, so that they could in all honesty so inform Mossadeq if the question were asked. The council of war went on for about four hours, and in the end it was decided that some action would be taken on Wednesday the 19th. As preparation for this effort, several specific activities were to be undertaken. In the field of political action, it was planned to send the Tehran cleric

to Qum to try to persuade the supreme cleric, Ayatollah Borujerdi, to issue a fatwa (religious decree) calling for a holy war against Communism, and also to build up a great demonstration on Wednesday on the theme that it was time for loyal army officers and soldiers and the people to rally to the support of religion and the throne. In the field of military action, support from outside of Tehran seemed essential. Colonel was sent off in a car driven by a station agent (US national Gerald Towne) to

to persuade Colonel , commanding officer of the garrison, to declare for the Shah. Zahedi, with Carroll, was sent to Brigadier General at with a similar request. Through station facilities these



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messengers were provided with identification papers and travel papers which stood up under inspection. All those leaving the compound were also given station-prepared curfew passes.

Throughout the long hours of 17 August, there seemed little that Headquarters could do to ease the pangs of despair. A wire sent to the station in the afternoon expressed the strong feeling that Roosevelt, in the interest of safety, should leave at the earliest moment, and it went on to express distress over the bad luck. At about the same time, an operational immediate cable went out to Ambassador Berry in Baghdad with guidance concerning his future meetings with the Shah. Propaganda guidance was sent to the stations at Karachi, New Delhi, Cairo, Damascus, Istanbul, and Beirut to the effect that the Zahedi government was the only legal one. Just after midnight Headquarters urged a Paris Station officer in southern France to get in touch with the Agha Khan at once, in order to urge the latter to send a wire to the Shah expressing his strongest moral support. Much later, Headquarters learned that contact had been established, but there was not the hoped-for outcome. The Agha Khan had at once stated that a ruler who left his throne and country would never return, and after this statement no effort was made to sell him on the idea of backing

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the Shah. Of course, he was later delighted to hear that the Shah did get his throne back after all.

At Nicosia the SIS refused to give up hope, and bucked against their own office in London and against the Foreign Office. Darbyshire continued to try to get permission to go to Baghdad. While the persistence and apparent faith shown by the SIS station at Nicosia was altogether admirable, it should be remembered that they had nothing to lose if the cause had been pressed to ultimate failure and disclosure.

The 18th was to be the most trying day for every person in every country who was aware of the project. At 0730 hours that morning the Shah left Baghdad for Rome on a regular BOAC commercial flight. It would be some hours before this news reached Tehran. In Tehran the day opened with small bands roaming the streets. The Tudeh managed to ransack the Pan-Iranist Party headquarters (claim credit for this incident) located near the Majlis Square, and then there were minor clashes between gangs of the Tudeh and the Third Force (a Marxist, non-Tudeh opposition group).

Morning papers appeared about as usual, although very few opposition sheets were available since secret police were posted at all printing shops. Those papers supporting Mossadeq announced that the Pahlevi dynasty had come to an

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end, while

wrote that the nation expressed its violent disapproval of the coup which was in foreign interests.

Shahed ran a copy of the firman, and Keyhan ran two brief notes on Zahedi's claims. Shojat, replacement for Besuye Ayandeh and, hence, the leading organ of the Tudeh Party, printed a statement by the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party--the first such statement to appear for some weeks. In this statement the party blamed the recent events on Anglo-American intrigue, and added that the watchword for the day must be: "...Down with the monarchy! Long live the democratic republic!" During the morning the AP correspondent wired out a story, destined to get considerable play abroad, which included Zahedi's statement to the officers of the Iranian Army: "Be ready for sacrifice and loss of your lives for the maintenance of independence and of the monarchy of Iran and of the holy religion of Islam which is now being threatened by infidel Communists."

Military communiqués read over Radio Tehran indicated that continuing efforts were being made by the government to firm up its control. One announcement offered a reward of 100,000 rials for information as to the whereabouts of

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General Zahedi;

and a third was a reminder that all demonstrations were forbidden by the government. At 1030 hours General Riahi, Chief of Staff, met with the high ranking officers of the army in the lecture hall of the Military School and read them the riot act, stressing that they must be faithful to the government.

Personnel at the Tehran Station, while continuing to make every effort to carry out its decision of the 16th, were also planning for eventualities. One message to Headquarters asked that the means for a clandestine evacuation of up to 15 people from Iran be prepared. Another cited local military opinion that officers would carry out instructions broadcast by the Shah, and then went on to put it up to Headquarters as to whether the station should continue with TPAJAX or withdraw. Nicosia commiserated over the initial failure and stated that they, personally, were continuing to do all they could to induce London to continue to support station efforts. This message was followed by a report on the Shah's statements at Baghdad, and by still another to the effect that SIS Nicosia was asking London's assent to urge the Shah's return on pilgrimage to the holy shrines in Iraq where he would be in

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direct contact with Iranian divines resident there.

During the afternoon most of the news was not of action but of statements from various sources. At his press conference Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatemi asserted that there had been serious anti-Shah riots in Baghdad--a complete lie. At 1500 hours the Shah arrived in Rome, where he was to make statements to the press which followed a middle ground. These statements did not dash the hopes of his supporters, but neither were they a call to action. Also, in the afternoon, Radio Moscow carried the text of the appeal of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party as it had been printed that morning in Shojat.

In the evening, violence flared in the streets of Tehran. Just what was the major motivating force is impossible to say, but it is possible to isolate the factors behind the disturbances. First, the flight of the Shah brought home to the populace in a dramatic way how far Mossadeq had gone, and galvanized the people into an irate pro-Shah force. Second, it seems clear that the Tudeh Party overestimated its strength in the situation. This fault may have been that of the Soviet liaison people, of the leaders of the Tudeh Party, or of the rank and file. During the day the Party not only had defiled statues of the monarchy, but also had erected their own flags at

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certain points. Party members had also torn down street signs in which the Pahlevi dynasty was mentioned or which commemorated events in the reign of Reza Shah, and had replaced them with "popular" names. The party seemed ready for an all-out effort to bring in a peoples' democracy, believing either that Mossadeq would not challenge them or that they could outfight him in the streets. Third, the Mossadeq government was at last beginning to feel very uneasy about its alliance with the Tudeh Party. The Pan-Iranists were infuriated and the Third Force was most unhappy about the situation. Fourth, the climax was now approaching of the campaign of alleged Tudeh terrorism. (Details of this campaign have been given on earlier pages.) On this evening had gangs of alleged Tudehites on the streets with orders to loot and smash shops on Lalezar and Amirieh streets whenever possible, and to make it clear that this was the Tudeh in action.

During the evening all these factors came together in ferment. Security forces were given orders to clear the streets and serious fighting resulted. Friends of Colonel

in the Police Department exceeded instructions in preventing Tudeh vandalism by beating up Tudehites and shouting for the Shah.



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The Tudeh did seem to take rapid cognizance of the facts that a covert action was being staged, and that their members were not strong enough to fight the police. They brought people out who tried to argue demonstrators into going home.

Headquarters spent a day featured by depression and despair. The immediate direction of the project moved from the Branch and Division to the highest level. At the end of the morning a handful of people worked on the draft of a message which was to call off the operation. As the message finally was sent, in the evening, it was based on the Department of State's tentative stand: "that the operation has been tried and failed," the position of the United Kingdom that: "we must regret that we cannot consider going on fighting" and Headquarters' position that, in the absence of strong recommendations to the contrary from Roosevelt and Henderson, operations against Mossadeq should be discontinued.

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