TRUTH HAS NO COLOUR

Iran After the Second World War, With Mossadegh and Zahedi

by Abdol Hossein Meftah (1899–1991)

Edited by Hashem Hakimi and Hamid Hakimi



A. H. Meftah

To my daughter "Dey"



Dey

Tehran, January 31st 1949 — Oslo, July 16th 1964



The author A. H. Meftah, his wife, Nancy with Hamid Hakimi, and Dr. H. Montazem — Antibes, France, December 1980

Table of Contents

Forward

PART I

- Fatemi and I
- Mossadegh and I
- Fatemi's Return to Tehran
- Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs
- Diplomatic Rupture with England
- The Reform of the Foreign Office
- From Bad to Worse
- Plan for a Military Operation Against Iraq
- Lavrentiev Replaced Sadtchikof
- Referendum
- Blood Round the Peacock Throne

PART II

- Zahedi and I
- My First Critic in Zahedi's Cabinet
- Renewing Diplomatic Relations with England
- My Lecture in Tehran's Staff College
- Baluchestan Frontier Dispute
- Oil Consortium
- I and the Russian Cultural Institute
- Baghdad Pact
- I Felt Myself Undesirable in the Ministry
- Building Tankers in Holland
- On My Return I Found My Country an American Satellite
- Special Status
- The Anti-Corruption Commission
- Russia Proposed a Bilateral Defense Pact
- Iran-Afghan Frontier Differences
- Electrification of Ninety-Two Towns of Iran
- Guardianship of Prince Ali

PART III

- Ambassador to Tunisia
- Ambassador to Oslo
- Iran's Land Reform Film on Norwegian TV
- The Death of Dey, My Only Daughter

APPENDIX

1. The Document of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with England
2. Mossadegh's Message to the British Nation
3. Interview with Sir Denis Wright
4. Document of the Origin of the Meftah Family
5. His Excellency the Late Abdol Hossein Meftah, 1899–1991
Bibliography

Forward

Dear Reader,

My father, Abdol Hossein Meftah, originally wrote this book in Persian. It was banned from publication in Iran under the late Shah, and was subsequently published, after the 1979 Iranian upheaval, in Germany. After his retirement, my father decided the book should be published in English as well, for a better understanding of Iran's dilemma by the world at large. He spent some time turning the text into English himself. He passed away, and the manuscript languished among his collection of books for some years. Recently, following pressure from friends and family, I was persuaded to make the book available to the English-speaking world.

Thanks to Mr. M. A. Karimzadeh for supplying the documentation on the origins of our family name, by Mahmoud Mefteh-al-Molk. Special thanks go to my father's friends, His Excellency Hashem Hakimi and his son Hakim, who spent many months sourcing the relevant photographs and retyping the manuscript into their computer, to make it ready for publication. For this I will forever be in their debt.

Bojang Meftah

London

Photograph



H.E. Hashem Hakimi and the publisher, Bojang Meftah, at the Langham Hotel, London, July 2007

PART I
Fatemi and I

It was my second year in Hamburg when, on Tuesday 27th of May 1952, I received a telegram from Bagher Kazemi, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Mossadegh's Cabinet, to the effect that the Prime Minister would leave Tehran for The Hague on 27th May, and that I should proceed immediately to Frankfurt to arrange the necessary security measures at the airport.

After informing the Iranian Minister in Stuttgart, Khalil Esfandiary, of the contents of the telegram, I left on the first train for Frankfurt, arriving the next day at 9 AM. I took a room at the hotel nearest the station and, after a quick wash and breakfast, contacted the police authorities to explain my presence in Frankfurt. They were very helpful, placing an officer and fifteen policemen in civilian attire at my disposal.

Since Dr. Mossadegh's plane was due to land at 18.40, I asked the police officer and his men to be at the hotel at 4 PM — an arrangement made very quickly, thanks to the cooperation of Frankfurt's police authorities. This left me plenty of time to go around the town to refresh my memory and have lunch, before resting to recover from a restless night.

At 4 PM the police officer and his men arrived in four cars, and we proceeded to the airport, which was placed under careful police watch on our arrival. Shortly afterwards, Esfandiary arrived, accompanied by two of his secretaries. Dr. Mossadegh's plane then landed. He was accompanied by a number of advisers and his private doctor — his son, Gholam Mossadegh. All disembarked during the stopover except Dr. Mossadegh himself, who felt it better to rest in bed on board. Mr. Esfandiary and I paid him a short visit on the plane. Since I was very interested in the proceedings of the International Court of Justice, I asked Dr. Mossadegh's permission to accompany him to The Hague, which he granted.

On the flight to The Hague, Dr. Mossadegh told me, “Dr. Fatemi is also on board. He is going to Hamburg for an operation for injuries sustained in the attempt on his life. You should look after him.”

We landed at Amsterdam airport at 8 PM. Dr. Mossadegh and his advisers — Hassibi, Dr. Shayegan, Dr. Aliabadi, Dr. Sanjabi (Judge ad hoc), Allahyar Saleh, Dr. Matin Daftary, and Dr. Gholam Hossein Mossadegh — left for The Hague with Mr. Navab, the Iranian Minister and representative there. I took Dr. Fatemi and his wife to a hotel in Amsterdam. The next morning, having arranged for Dr. Fatemi's transfer to a hospital in Hamburg already arranged for him, I went to The Hague to attend the Court's proceedings. However, as Professor Rolin needed several days to study Iran's defence, the hearing was postponed to 9th June. I felt that remaining in The Hague during the recess would be a waste of time, so, after a short visit to Dr. Mossadegh — who again asked me to look after Dr. Fatemi — I left for Hamburg on 31st May.

I arrived in Hamburg that afternoon and visited Dr. Fatemi in hospital. He was not at all well; his doctor, while advising that an operation was necessary, was unsure of its outcome. Two days later, however, Dr. Fatemi was operated on, and thanks to the surgeon's skill, the result was satisfactory. It was nonetheless a long time before he could leave the hospital, and even then he was not fully cured — he suffered constantly from a rupture in his stomach, for which he had to wear a special belt.

During Dr. Fatemi's long recuperation, I visited him regularly, two or three times a week, bringing him newspapers, magazines, and sometimes even Persian food! Inevitably, we would discuss our country's problems now and then. One day, when I felt he was strong enough for a lengthy conversation, I raised the subject of certain Tehran newspapers' strong criticism of the Shah and the Royal Family, which I felt was against the interest of our activities in Europe on behalf of oil nationalisation.

Fatemi, trying to appear calm and choosing his words carefully, tried to make me understand that interference from the Imperial Court — particularly the Royal Family and those around the Shah — was a great hindrance to the real social reform the country needed; and, somewhat tongue in cheek, he said, “Public opinion is quite different from what you think.” I told him, briefly, what I had seen and heard myself from people of our various tribes, from the west of the country to its furthest eastern reaches, about what the name and person of “Shah” meant to them, and told him plainly that a change of regime in Iran would risk the dismemberment of the country — the earnest desire of our northern neighbour. Besides, it should not be forgotten that the Shah himself had greatly helped achieve oil nationalisation;

how, then, could he now be a barrier to reform? It was undeniable that our Royal Court needed radical reform — but that reform, in my view, was not so difficult to achieve.

Here Dr. Fatemi cut me off and said, “Very well, we make you a present of this.” I replied that I would rather he take what I had said into consideration and study it, and if he found me mistaken, I would gladly hear his reasons and submit to them. But I wanted him to know what I had said to Dr. Mossadegh. At this he grew uneasy and asked, impatiently, “What did you say to Mossadegh?”

I told him I had gone to The Hague in June to hear Dr. Mossadegh argue against the Court's competence to hear the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, and that I had told him of the strong rumours — in the papers and among Iranians in Hamburg — of poor relations between the Imperial Court and Dr. Mossadegh, which were harming my own work in Germany, where I was trying hard to find a market for our oil. This had led me to seek an interview with Dr. Mossadegh, through his son's help; I succeeded, and spent nearly an hour and a half informing him of the consequences of the rift between his government and the Court, which he did not seem to appreciate. I came to believe that Dr. Fatemi had not been aware of it either — he asked whether Dr. Mossadegh had known of it. No, I told him.

He suddenly grew interested and said, “Then it must be worth hearing — what was it?”

I said, “In my view it was very interesting, so please listen carefully. As I told Dr. Mossadegh: because of my deep interest in your success in nationalising our oil industry — my own longstanding wish, as it is every Iranian's — I am troubled to see that the way you are handling the case suggests you intend to play the Anglo-Russian card.” Dr. Fatemi became so interested that he set aside his Le Monde and listened attentively. I went on: “Surely Dr. Mossadegh remembers how Iran was occupied during the war, and how Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of the Crown Prince, while Russia and England were both strongly opposed to Mohammad Reza Shah taking his father's place?” Mossadegh had said he was not aware of that. In short: when Reza Shah was forced to abdicate, Russia and England jointly approached Mr. Saed, our ambassador in Moscow, asking him to accept the regency of Iran until a Shah was chosen! Saed refused, but suggested they approach Foroughi, who was more suitable and popular; his suggestion was accepted, but Foroughi also refused.

To pressure Foroughi into accepting the regency, the British Ambassador, Reader Bullard, together with his Russian colleague Smirnov, visited him the day before the Shah took the oath and informed him that their governments would not recognise Mohammad Reza as Shah of Persia! “So,” I told Fatemi, “anyone informed of that episode will no doubt believe you are playing the Anglo-Russian card!”

Dr. Fatemi said nothing and fell into deep thought. Our conversation had gone on so long that I felt it best to take my leave, so he could think over what I had told Dr. Mossadegh.

Photographs for this chapter



Bagher Kazemi



M. A. Foroughi



Saed Maragheh



Dr. Hossein Fatemi



Mossadegh's Second Cabinet, presented to the Shah

Mossadegh and I

Here I feel it necessary to go into detail about what passed between Dr. Mossadegh and me, in the Palace Hotel at The Hague on 12th June 1952, since I believe my interview with him reveals a page of history — what was going on behind the scenes, and why I went to The Hague to see him.

A good number of my compatriots who were in Hamburg during my two years as Consul General (1950–1952) knew of my effort to introduce my country's problems, and its struggle to escape the miseries created for it simply because Iran had oil — to the German public through a weekly bulletin I published!

Each issue of the bulletin carried an article written by me, explaining our problems and the injustice done by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. My writing was not as forceful as it was later described by Elwell Sutton in his book Persian Oil. Strangely, my patriotic articles were disliked by our Legation in Köln — our Minister's pretext being that my articles did not please the British authorities.

Apart from the articles, I made myself something of a travelling public relations officer, lecturing German youth and journalists on our problems and on how Iran had been treated by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company over the fifty years since its concession was acquired.

In the midst of this effort, the most unpleasant and discouraging news reached me from Tehran, concerning deep differences between the Shah and Dr. Mossadegh. At the same time, word reached Hamburg that the British government had referred the oil dispute to the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague, and that Dr. Mossadegh was travelling there to contest the Court's competence to interfere in what he held to be solely an Iranian national affair.

I was eagerly awaiting his arrival in The Hague so that I could go there and speak with him, to make him see the harm that the rift between him and the Shah would do to his plan for nationalising our oil.

On 7th June 1952, Tehran Radio announced Dr. Mossadegh's departure for The Hague. The next day I left Hamburg for The Hague and attended the Court's proceedings, particularly the defence given by Professor Henri Rolin, which was highly praised by listeners. The proceedings ran until 11th June, and once they were over, I judged the time ripe for my interview with Dr. Mossadegh. Through his son, Dr. Gholam Mossadegh, I secured an appointment for 12.45 on 12th June.

At the appointed time, I entered his apartment in the Palace Hotel. He received me warmly, and we sat facing each other. I thanked him for receiving me and began: “As you know, I have been trying to attract German public opinion and sympathy toward your patriotic struggle and our country's national cause, through the weekly bulletin and through lectures. But I regret to say that certain rumours leaking out of Tehran, reflected in the European press, are not only hampering my own efforts — they are doing real harm to your work of nationalising the oil.”

Mossadegh asked, “What news and rumours?”

I replied, “The first troubling report in the Tehran papers was that you told members of Parliament, invited to your home, that you expected the British to submit to your plan within two or three months, and so had not drawn up a proper plan to fight them — and that you asked those present to gather and draft one themselves.”

Dr. Mossadegh said, “I told the truth.”

I replied, “Truly, when I read that, I felt surprised and disappointed, because I could not believe that a statesman such as your Excellency would embark on so important a campaign without a plan prepared beforehand — particularly when this very meagre oil income was what allowed the country to stand on its feet. You can see for yourself that even now, seven years after the war, Britain still lives under a strict rationing system, bearing every hardship for the sake of her financial and economic recovery. What made your Excellency think that a country which endured all the miseries of the war while husbanding her resistance would surrender to us for the sake of a few barrels of oil? I had assumed you already had an economic plan prepared to replace the lost oil income, so the government could bear the burden of the undertaking it had committed itself to, while giving the people a chance to occupy themselves in ordinary work. Even now — late as it is — if we cut our losses, it could be the beginning of a gain. I would therefore suggest employing the army, which at present has nothing to do and is, in the present difficult conditions, a burden on the country, in the fields to help the peasants, so that at least the daily bread of the people is secured, while the world watches your government struggling seriously toward its aim. Such a struggle would surely attract the sympathy and admiration of friend and foe alike.”

Dr. Mossadegh liked the suggestion, but said, “His Majesty would not like us to touch the army.”

I said, “Very well — if His Majesty disapproves of using the army for such an important struggle, you should immediately organise a labour force and put it to work in the fields.”

Dr. Mossadegh asked how such a force should be organised. Having in mind the German Arbeitsdienst system, I explained how it might be organised and recruited. Dr. Mossadegh took note of the idea.

I continued, “There is another matter I would like to raise with your Excellency — a strong rumour of sharp differences between the Imperial Court and the government, over both the oil question and other political matters. Given the record that our two great neighbours were never in favour of His Majesty's enthronement, such rumours would give your opponents an effective reason to claim you are playing the old Anglo-Russian card. I wonder whether your Excellency is aware of that record?”

Dr. Mossadegh said, “I know nothing of that. Please tell me what happened, and how.”

I related the case as the late Soheili, then Foreign Minister, had told it to me: England and Russia had not wanted Mohammad Reza Shah to succeed his father. They preferred that a Regent be appointed before any final decision was taken. They first approached our Ambassador in Moscow, Mr. Saed, who declined, suggesting that Mr. M. A. Foroughi, the Prime Minister of the day, would — given his popularity — be better suited to the task. Foroughi rebuffed them firmly. The day before the Shah's proclamation, Bullard, the British Ambassador, and his Russian counterpart, Smirnov, went together to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and said: “Our governments are informed that tomorrow the Crown Prince will go before Parliament to take the oath and be proclaimed Shah of Iran. We are here to inform you that our governments will not recognise his reign.”

Soheili replied that, under the agreement signed between Iran and the Allies, they had no right to interfere in Iran's internal affairs — and that this was plainly such a matter. Bullard, who spoke for the two, said only, “We are instructed simply to inform you of our governments' decision.” Soheili suggested they would do better to meet the Prime Minister himself, and went upstairs to Foroughi's office to arrange it. Foroughi received them; Bullard repeated the message, more forcefully this time, and left without hearing Foroughi's objection that the decision contravened the agreement signed between the three powers.

Foroughi was deeply disturbed, and sat for a while with his head in his hands. Eventually he rose and went to the Palace. When he was received by the Crown Prince, he was clearly troubled — the Crown Prince, perhaps already informed indirectly of the Anglo-Russian decision, said as soon as he saw him, “You have come to tell me they will not recognise my reign? If you truly believe it is in the country's best interest, it would be better to cancel tomorrow's ceremony.”

Foroughi replied, “They came only to inform me of their governments' decision. We shall proceed according to plan.”

My last sentence was barely finished when Dr. Mossadegh lost his composure and said, loudly, “Mr. Meftah, my difficulty is that not even two of the twelve members of my Cabinet agree with one another. What am I to do?”

I was taken aback, and thought to myself, “Worse still.” I gathered myself and said, “Now that you have heard this history, the best thing you can do on returning to Tehran is go straight to the Shah, lay your cards on the table, and open your heart to him, so the differences between the two of you can be settled.”

It was about 1.45 PM; we were both tired and hungry. I took my leave, as I was expected out to lunch, and we exchanged pleasantries. Leaving, I felt our conversation had made a favourable impression on him — I sensed he had fallen, not entirely willingly, into the grip of a group he did not quite know how to manage. The disagreement among the members of his own party at The Hague was plain to see — I never once saw two of them sitting together, let alone consulting one another.

Soon after lunch I returned to Hamburg, where I listened eagerly to Tehran Radio to learn what Dr. Mossadegh would do on his return. It gave me great satisfaction to hear that, on arriving in Tehran, he went straight to the Palace for an audience with the Shah that lasted over three hours.

Photographs for this chapter



Dr. Mossadegh, Dr. Fatemi, and A. H. Meftah (right behind Dr. Mossadegh) at the International Court, The Hague



Foroughi takes the Crown Prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to Parliament for his proclamation



Bullard, on his way to present his credentials to Reza Shah



Soheili



Smirnov and his Embassy staff at the Marble Palace, greeting the Shah for Norouz 1320

Fatemi's Return to Tehran

Fatemi's condition was improving, though the muscles of his stomach were healing poorly, and a kind of rupture had developed there, which kept his surgeons worried and caused him pain from time to time.

On one of his last days in hospital, Fatemi returned to our earlier discussion of reform and said, “Mr. Meftah, in your reports as well as in conversation, you always speak of the country's urgent need for reform. It has drawn everyone's attention in the government. But surely you are not ready to leave your pleasant life in Europe and come to Tehran for the sake of the very reforms you advocate!”

I replied at once, “You are quite wrong. I have never been a favourite of the Ministry or the government. Because of my rather sharp tongue and pen, I was always on the black list of my superiors, with the result that I could win nobody's favour, and had to remain in Tehran three or four years before I could manage a posting abroad — and even that, I suspect, was only because they wished to be rid of my poisonous tongue and pen!”

Fatemi said, “We do not dislike your criticism — on the contrary, we value it. It is true we differ on certain points, but honest criticism is very much appreciated by us.”

I should mention here that from the day I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, what I saw and read there provoked my criticism; it reached the higher authorities, but was regularly swept under the rug by empty-headed superiors.

Fatemi was still in hospital when Hossein Macky, accompanied by Messrs. Parsa and Mahlooji, came through Hamburg on their way to the United States. During their brief stay they became acquainted with me and my views, as they did also, through the Iranians resident in Hamburg, with my work and reputation there.

Fatemi felt well enough at last to leave for Iran. He left Hamburg on Tuesday, 11th September 1952, travelling via Geneva to meet his wife and newborn son before going on to Tehran.

Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs

About a month after Fatemi's departure from Hamburg, my wife and I, along with a few close friends, were listening to Radio Tehran when it announced the resignation of Hossein Navab, the Foreign Minister. We all wondered who would succeed him, and everyone present named a different candidate — until my wife said, half joking, “Dr. Fatemi.” We all laughed at her.

Two days later, on 11th October 1952, I was in my office talking with a German gentleman, Captain K. — one of the more daring pilots of the twentieth century, having smuggled arms into Spain more than twenty times during the Spanish Civil War without ever being caught — when my telephone rang. I picked up the receiver and answered in German, “Meftah speaking.” The caller replied in Persian: “Meftah, how are you?” It was my wife — she always greeted me that way when one of her predictions had come true. I asked what had happened. Had I been listening to the radio? I said no. “Didn't I tell you Dr. Fatemi would become Foreign Minister, and you all laughed at me?” she said. “Now you see I was right — the BBC has just announced his appointment.”

I put the receiver down and carried on my conversation with Captain K., my mind elsewhere. I could have imagined Fatemi taking almost any post except the Foreign Ministry, particularly since he had so recently been elected to Parliament, and had seemed, from our own conversations, genuinely enthusiastic about that role instead.

The news left me thoughtful and uneasy for the rest of the day, until the usual circular telegram arrived from Tehran confirming the appointment. By evening I had a further telegram from Dr. Fatemi himself, instructing me to hand over the Consulate-General to my assistant, Dr. Sadri, and leave immediately for Tehran, where a new post awaited me. This telegram troubled me — between our earlier conversations and its arrival, the uprising of 20th July 1952 had taken place, hardly a favourable sign for Mossadegh's government, and General Setvat, Fatemi's father-in-law, who had come from Tehran only days before Fatemi's own departure there, had already told me something of the instability within Dr. Mossadegh's Cabinet.

Apart from that, the telegram I myself received was vague; it did not indicate what kind of post was envisaged for me. I wondered whether it was to be in the Foreign Ministry or elsewhere. And if it was indeed in the Ministry, was accepting it in the Ministry's interest, or in that of my own career — or neither?!

I had no doubt that the majority of the Foreign Affairs civil servants would not welcome Dr. Fatemi's appointment as Foreign Minister. Given that, if my post was in fact within the Ministry, how would my colleagues there react to my own appointment — would they see me as an instrument of Fatemi's, a buffer for themselves, or both? What would they expect of me politically?

What political work had been done up to that point? According to Dr. Mossadegh himself, nothing had proceeded on any real plan, and what had been done had been so badly handled that he had put both himself and the country into a very difficult position!

Did Dr. Mossadegh intend to reach an understanding with England? Was the American mediation genuine, or was America being used by the British to damage her own reputation and prestige? Why were the Russians keeping so quiet — was there, even now, some mutual understanding between England and Russia over Iran?

The more I turned over these different angles of our foreign relations, the more confused and dizzy I became, especially not knowing Dr. Mossadegh's eventual aim. I preferred, therefore, to content myself with the belief that he had taken foreign policy entirely into his own hands, and that the Foreign Ministry was in any case not permitted to express opinions of its own — so there was little point in troubling myself over matters on which the Ministry was not even consulted.

All these considerations led me to look for an excuse to delay my departure for Tehran. Dr. Fatemi knew I had been waiting for him to leave Hamburg so that I could finally have the eye operation that had been due before his arrival there. I therefore contacted my eye specialist at once, asked for the earliest possible date, and sent Dr. Fatemi a telegram citing this as my reason for delay. At the same time, I telegraphed my brother and two friends in the Foreign Ministry, asking what post awaited me and whether it was wise for me to proceed to Tehran at all. My brother's answer was that I had been called to replace Nabil as Undersecretary, and that I should leave for Tehran immediately, since most of my colleagues in the Ministry believed my presence there would serve the Ministry's interests, and their own.

Two days later I received a further telegram from Dr. Fatemi requesting that I proceed to Tehran at once. The next day he telephoned me and said, “Mr. Meftah, please start immediately. Work has piled up. Your eye operation can be arranged later — do not worry about that. I have ordered your tickets to be sent.”

Following these telegrams and the telephone call, letters from my brother and friends informed me that my colleagues were awaiting my arrival impatiently, fearing that if I refused the offer, some outsider backed by the National Front would be imposed on Fatemi instead — to the Ministry's detriment.

That show of support from my colleagues persuaded me to set aside my eye surgery, urgent as it was, and to give greater weight to safeguarding the Ministry — or, better said, my ancestors' home. I saw my eye specialist and cancelled the booking. I left Hamburg by car for Bonn on 19th October 1952, where I bid farewell to the Iranian Minister and various German officials, and the next day flew from Frankfurt to Tehran, leaving my wife and children in Hamburg to join me later.

I must add that, even though I was going to take up an important post in Tehran, I left Hamburg reluctantly, carrying with me some of the best memories of my life — the warmth and respect of my compatriots and German friends there. On my departure, the Iranian colony in Hamburg held an afternoon tea party at the Hotel Atlantic, and the feeling and sympathy shown there toward my wife and me was deeply moving.

I have never forgotten two lines recited by one of my compatriots at the close of an eloquent speech that day — translated here as best I can into English: “It is no use enthroning yourself in a ministry; happy are those who can enthrone themselves in people's hearts.” It should indeed be every man's struggle to win that throne. No reward could mean more to me than those words, and I am proud and glad that, even now, a decade on from those days in Hamburg, I still hold a place in a corner of those hearts.

At 8.20 PM, having taken leave of my wife, my sister, and the few friends who accompanied me as far as Frankfurt, I flew on to Tehran. The next day, 21st October 1952, at about 5 PM, the plane touched down at Mehrabad Airport. Nearly all my colleagues from the Ministry were there to receive me. Sensing their anxiety, I embraced each of them in turn, as a sign of reassurance, and left the airport with my brother for his home.

Diplomatic Rupture with England

Arriving at my office on 22nd October 1952 at 9 AM, an attendant from the Minister's office hurried to tell me the Minister was expecting me.

When I reached his office, Dr. Fatemi rose to greet me and asked, “Where have you been? We have been expecting you for over a week — your colleagues went to the airport once already and returned disappointed. Now, as time is short and a great deal of work has accumulated, we had better go through it first; we can talk properly later.”

He called for his private secretary and asked that all the Directors gather in the Undersecretary's office. It was not long before they had assembled there. Fatemi, still needing his stick to walk, led me through the connecting door into the Undersecretary's office. After thanking the outgoing Undersecretary, Mr. Nabil, and noting that Nabil was shortly leaving for a post abroad, Fatemi said he had found me capable and trustworthy enough for the responsibility that came with the position. He finished, “I therefore introduce Mr. Meftah to you, gentlemen, as your new Undersecretary,” and left the room.

As soon as Fatemi had gone, Mr. Nabil approached me warmly, offering congratulations and his own seat, before leaving in some haste — as if relieved of a burden.

It was easy to understand why: working under Fatemi, as readers will see in the pages that follow, was not an easy matter for a man like Nabil, given the plans Fatemi had in mind for the Foreign Ministry.

My colleagues, having congratulated me and expressed satisfaction that their new second-in-command was an old hand at the Ministry, left the room. Calling on God's assistance, I sat down at my desk and spent the entire day at work.

The next day Dr. Fatemi came to my office to take me to the Majles, the Iranian Parliament, to be formally introduced as Undersecretary of the Foreign Office. Being extremely busy, I had given no thought to the formalities required, so I simply cleared my desk and left with him. The Majles had just begun its regular session; Fatemi introduced me according to custom, and I received the congratulations of the House.

We could not leave at once and so sat for a while. The first thing to catch my attention was the presentation, by Ghanatabadi, of a great roll of petition said to bear thousands of signatures, demanding the dissolution of the Senate. Discussion began, and it was not long before Parliament voted unanimously for the Senate's dissolution.

The speed with which such an important resolution passed struck me as almost comic. Fatemi noticed my astonishment, tinged with a certain sarcasm, and whispered in my ear, “It is a theatre, is it not?” I replied, dryly, “Not theatre — perhaps a comedy!”

After a short time Parliament went into recess and we left for the Foreign Office. As we were leaving the grounds, I suddenly realised I should have been presented to the Shah first. I turned to Fatemi and said, “A mistake has been made — you should have taken me to the Palace first.” He stopped short and said, “You are right, I did not think of it. I shall arrange it first thing in the morning.”

The next morning we went to Saad Abad Palace and, after a short pause in Mr. Ala's office, were led in to see the Shah. Fatemi, carrying his stick and limping, entered ahead of me; the Shah, as was customary on such occasions, stood a few paces from the door. We bowed, the Shah shook hands, and Fatemi introduced me. The Shah said, “With such a young and willing minister, you should succeed in your duties.” We took our leave shortly afterward and returned to the Ministry.

My real duties began from that date. For the first two weeks I was fully occupied receiving heads of the diplomatic missions and attending various receptions.

On the afternoon of Thursday, 30th October 1952, while I was hard at work in my office, Fatemi opened the connecting door and invited me into his. I found him very tired, and asked whether he was exhausted, or unwell. “Both,” he said. There was not much for him to do in his own office — he saw barely five percent of the correspondence himself, most of his time being taken up with National Front activities, guiding the press, and receiving sympathisers of the National Front who had nothing to do with the Foreign Ministry at all.

Fatemi asked what I planned to do the next day, Friday, the Iranian weekend. I said I intended to come in and work all day. “I shall be here about eleven o'clock,” he said, “and I would like you to be here as well.” I said I hoped it would be something pleasant. He rose and said, “I must go now — we shall meet tomorrow.”

I returned to my office and carried on working, though my mind kept returning to what could be so important that Fatemi wished to discuss it with me on a Friday.

The next day I went in even earlier than eleven to clear some work before our meeting. Fatemi arrived shortly after and called me into his office; I sat opposite him as usual. He said, “The Prime Minister wishes to see you at 6 PM.” I asked if there was anything new. “Yes,” he replied, “we have broken off diplomatic relations with England, and Middleton” — the British Chargé d'Affaires — “leaves tomorrow morning. The Prime Minister would like you to see him off at Karaj.”

I said, “Apart from my being against the rupture itself — which, luckily for me, took place before I arrived in Tehran — seeing Middleton off at Karaj runs contrary to tradition, and I don't see the sense in it.”

Fatemi asked why I objected to the severance of diplomatic relations. I said, “Today several countries are fighting one another openly in Korea without breaking off diplomatic relations. I cannot understand why we should sever ours over what is, at root, an economic or commercial dispute. And while we still had normal relations with England, we could not reach an understanding with her — what real hope of success is there through the mediation of others? I would not be at all surprised to see the British tighten their economic encirclement further and create yet more difficulties for us.” Fatemi replied, “It was a decision taken at a Cabinet meeting; nothing can be done about it now.”

I said, “In any case, I see no point in my seeing the Chargé d'Affaires off, and I don't think it's the right thing to do. It would be better if you explained my view to the Prime Minister yourself.”

Fatemi said, “The Prime Minister's instruction was that you meet him at six. If you can persuade him of your view, then don't go to see Middleton. As things stand, you must go — those are his orders.”

Being new to Tehran, I was not yet fully acquainted with the protocols involved, particularly those for entering Mossadegh's house. I left my office a little early, in my battered official car. As this was only my second visit to his house, the guards and secret police did not yet know me, and I could not simply enter. The great iron gate was shut; the guard asked my name and pressed a button, and another soldier opened the door just enough to peer out. The outer guard told him a gentleman was there claiming to be the Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, with a six o'clock appointment with His Excellency the Prime Minister. The door closed again, and after two or three minutes reopened; a man in a civilian suit came out and asked, “His Excellency Mr. Meftah?” “Yes,” I said. “Follow me, please.”

He led me past a few soldiers standing about the garden and up the steps of the building, where a soldier stood guard with a bayoneted rifle, and a plainclothes secret policeman sat nearby on a chair. This man rose and took me to Mr. Freydooni, the Prime Minister's private secretary. I introduced myself; he rose at once, showed me to the waiting room on the second floor, and went to inform Mossadegh of my arrival. He returned before long and led me in to Mossadegh's office-bedroom.

Dr. Mossadegh, lying half-stretched out in bed, gestured to a chair near him and said, “Please sit down.” Then, “Middleton leaves early tomorrow morning, and I want you to see him off at Karaj with every courtesy, and to tell him that I am very sorry I could not see him again before his departure, but that I wish him a pleasant journey and a safe return to his country.” Mossadegh then handed me a large, open yellow envelope containing a message to the British nation, saying it should be delivered to Écher, the Swiss Minister — since Middleton no longer had any official status in Iran and could not properly accept it himself — so that Écher could pass it on to him.

I said, “I shall certainly see that this message reaches Mr. Écher — but do you not think it inadvisable that I should be the one to see Middleton off?”

“Why?” asked Mossadegh.

I replied that there was no precedent for an Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry to see off a Chargé d'Affaires, or even the head of a mission — it would not look well in the public eye, and would tarnish the Ministry's standing.

“If you would rather not go alone, take someone with you,” Mossadegh said. Feeling he had missed my point entirely, I said, “In principle, my seeing him off is simply not appropriate. If you will allow it, I would rather send the Chief of Protocol to the Embassy to deliver the message and convey your good wishes there, since the Embassy is his point of departure.”

“No,” said Mossadegh, “as I said, it is you who should go, as far as Karaj — and if you wish to bring someone else, you may.” I repeated what I had said before. He looked uncomfortable and said, “Mr. Meftah, why are you haggling so?” — and insisted those were his wishes.

I took the envelope and went, angrily, to the Chief of Protocol's home. I told Mr. Meykadeh to be at the Embassy by 5 AM the next morning to accompany Middleton to Karaj, where we were to see him off, and went home. Having to rise early, I went to bed sooner than usual, but was too angry and unsettled to sleep — I could not understand the purpose of sending me to see Middleton off at all. After a very uncomfortable night, I left my bed at 4 AM and reached the British Embassy at the appointed hour. Mr. Meykadeh arrived shortly after. Middleton, in his drawing room, offered us tea; he was clearly not quite ready to leave, and our presence there was plainly something of an embarrassment to him, so we set off for Karaj ahead of him at a slow pace. Passing through Karaj, we saw the Embassy cars overtake us at speed. We finally caught up with Middleton's party at Hessarak, a few kilometres beyond Karaj, opposite the School of Agriculture, where they had stopped for breakfast and to take leave of a few diplomats.

There I conveyed Dr. Mossadegh's wish for his safe return home, then turned to Écher to hand him the message intended for Middleton. Écher refused it, saying, “I regret we are not permitted to accept it.”

I returned to Tehran at once and went straight to Dr. Mossadegh's house, arriving about 9 AM. His private servant, Mashadi Mehdi, showed me to the waiting room, brought my first cup of tea of the day, and went to announce me. The cup was not even half empty before he returned with word that I should come in.

Dr. Mossadegh was sitting up in bed when I entered, the yellow envelope still in my hand. We exchanged greetings and he gestured me to the chair beside the bed. I told him his message had been conveyed — that Middleton thanked His Excellency for it, but that the Swiss Minister had refused to accept the message to the British nation, saying he was not authorised to do so. Mossadegh took the envelope, tossed it onto the bed, and said, “Écher says he was not authorised to accept my message? Very well — I have nothing further to trouble you with.” I left him, but the message was published and broadcast that same day regardless.

His message to the British people was accurate in substance, save for an unfounded condemnation of Reza Shah — a point later addressed by Elwell Sutton in his book Persian Oil.

I noted above that Mossadegh did the late Reza Shah an injustice in that message. He chose to overlook that the state of the country after the First World War was itself a legacy of the Qajar era, and it was equally unfair not to weigh the country's confused affairs, its unbalanced international relations, and the famine and abject poverty that accompanied them.

By severing diplomatic relations with England, the wise men of the National Front had certainly proved something of their wisdom. All my colleagues, and those who knew my family well, know that my own feelings toward both England and Russia have always been the same — given the inhumane, humiliating, and ruinous treatment we received from both, a short history of which I have set down in my book Armane Iran (“Longing of Iran”). That is why I, like every other Persian from the Shah down to the poorest in the land, greeted oil nationalisation with real joy.

My reports from Hamburg in particular, and the bulletins I distributed there during my two years there, are the best evidence of my own view of the two colonial powers — a view formed by close study of my country's international relations over the preceding two centuries.

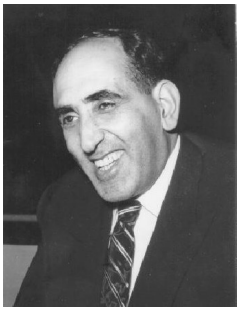
Yet in spite of my personal feelings, I did not think severing diplomatic relations with England was at all advisable. By keeping normal relations open, there remained some possibility of eventually reaching an understanding, while also guarding against the dangers of economic pressure and blockade. I worried a great deal that the rupture would create further difficulties for us — which, unfortunately, it did. At times I felt the country had been drawn into something like a political blockade.

I recall very well a Cabinet meeting — held, though Mossadegh himself was not present, at his own house — where a row broke out between the Minister of Education and the Acting Finance Minister over the Ministry of Education's budget. The Minister of Education was pressing for further government borrowing; the Acting Finance Minister refused, saying the government could not raise the credit. When Dr. Azar, the Minister of Education, pressed his point, Mr. Jaafari, the Acting Finance Minister, lost his temper and, using a Persian expression for the government's finances, said, “Mr. Azar, what are you asking for — it will burst one of these days!” Mr. Akhavi, the Minister of Economy, broke in, “Burst? No — it will go off like a bomb!”

I watched all this with a mixture of surprise and wry amusement. Dr. Moazami, the Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone, sitting opposite me, seemed to catch my look, and asked quietly, with a wink, “What do you see?”

I answered, very quietly, “This is the inner workings of the government, and of its finances. In the Foreign Office, I feel we are in a very delicate international position — we have reached a dead end. We are, in effect, under a political blockade. I see no way out. God alone may save our country.”

Photographs for this chapter



Dr. Moazami

The Reform of the Foreign Office

With the diplomatic rupture with England now complete, the activities of Henderson, the American Ambassador in Tehran, picked up pace — though with Fatemi at the head of the Foreign Ministry, the Americans in fact curtailed their visits there. Fatemi himself took little interest in day-to-day political affairs, so I was, in practice, in charge of the whole business. He did, however, take a real interest in reorganising the Ministry, a subject we had discussed at length while both still in Hamburg, and now that I was in Tehran he wanted to make a start on it.

Before my return, the Ministry had already drawn up a reorganisation project and sent it to the Cabinet for approval. I asked for it to be sent back for revision, feeling it needed to be examined by a proper commission. Fatemi agreed, but insisted that Dr. Kaviani and two young members of the Foreign Office be included. I argued that reorganising the Ministry was not work for inexperienced young men — the commission should be made up of experienced hands, who could consult younger members for their views. I proposed that I should chair it myself, bringing in Abdollah Entezam and another experienced colleague, with two younger members in a consultative role. Fatemi did not care for the suggestion, but, sensing I would not easily be moved from it, gave way — on condition that the three people he had named be included.

The commission began its review. In the meantime, Fatemi kept pressing me to speed up the reorganisation; my difficulty was that the Ministry's heavy workload left little time to accelerate the commission's work. One day he came into my office again, pressing the same point. Unable to guess what he had in mind, I felt a little suspicious. I told him the reform had two parts — administrative reform and personnel reform. Before I could finish, he said, “I mean personnel reform should come first.” I said that was easy enough, though I thought it better to finish the administrative reform first. “No, no,” he said, “get on with personnel reorganisation first.” I agreed.

I sat at my desk and drew up a list of forty-five names to be let go, and gave it to him, saying, “There you are — but on one condition: that you do nothing about it yourself. Leave it to me, as I know better how to handle it. Of these forty-five, only a few are genuinely of no use; the rest are educated, respectable civil servants who could be transferred to other Ministries. Handled that way, the reorganisation will succeed.” I added a second condition — that the list be kept absolutely secret, and shown to no one.

Fatemi agreed, saying, “Let me study the list first, and then we shall talk it over.”

A few days later, Parsa, a National Front member, came to see me and said, “I must congratulate you.” “Congratulate me — for what?” I asked. “For the list you gave Fatemi,” he said. “I told him that if he had asked the Director of Personnel for such a list, he could never have produced one so quickly. It shows how well Meftah knows the background of every member of the Foreign Office.” I thanked him for the compliment, though I felt distinctly uneasy — Fatemi had plainly not kept to our agreement that the list remain secret. It seemed it had already been discussed at National Front meetings.

About a week later, Fatemi called me into his room and said, “I have studied the list. To my mind it is not complete — I understand the real figure is not forty-five but one hundred and ten. I suggest you look into this more deeply.”

I replied that our arrangement had been to keep the list confidential, and yet I had learned it had already been discussed at a National Front meeting, where the figure of one hundred and ten had come from. Fatemi denied this, insisting his own study had led him to that number, and that I should simply examine the matter more carefully.

I later learned that it was Dr. Kaviani, within the National Front, who had pushed hardest against the Foreign Office, originally proposing a list of one hundred and seventy names for dismissal — a political purge — before the group settled on one hundred and ten. I also learned that the Foreign Office had been heavily attacked and insulted at these National Front meetings. Armed with that knowledge, I did not pass up the chance, at one commission meeting where Dr. Kaviani had provoked me badly, to repay the National Front in kind — I walked out of the meeting in protest at their indecent treatment of the Foreign Office.

Abdollah Entezam, who was present, thought as I did — that this gesture would surely cost me my post, and that my dismissal would follow me home before long.

Contrary to our expectations, the next morning, while I was at work in my office, Fatemi opened the door and called me in. He handed me a letter from Dr. Kaviani, stating that after what had happened at the previous day's commission meeting, he believed his presence would no longer be welcome, and that he would therefore refrain from attending any future meetings. Fatemi watched closely for my reaction. “The only good thing Kaviani has done in his entire life,” I said, “is this. I am very pleased.”

Fatemi then repeated an opinion I knew was not really his own — that the true number was indeed higher than forty-five. Listening to him at these meetings, it dawned on me that the real motive behind the reorganisation was to clear the way for political appointments, to bring in his own cronies and friends.

The only way I could see to relieve the pressure Fatemi was putting on the commission over personnel reform was to separate it entirely from administrative reform. I said to him, “To avoid any misunderstanding or discrimination, I suggest a separate commission go through everyone's file — from mine down to the lowest grade.” Fatemi liked the idea, and told me to form the commission at once under my own chairmanship. Its work was to be kept strictly secret, and to that end a room was made available to it at Police Headquarters.

I chose Entezam and two others to work with me. But going through four hundred personnel files was not a task of days, or even weeks — it needed months, as indeed it did on this and one later occasion. That, in the end, was the only way to escape both Fatemi's pressure and the National Front's, and it helped save the Foreign Office from undue political interference — and, eventually, from the destruction the regime would otherwise have brought upon it.

It was before the special commission's third meeting that Fatemi fell ill again, from his old injury, and had to return to Germany for further treatment.

The day after the commission's first meeting, Fatemi had come into my room and said, “I would like to talk with you about the personnel reform.” “I am at your disposal,” I replied.

“You show yourself something of a fanatic about your own list,” he said, “and while some believe it was well chosen, it seems to me you have left a few names off it.” “Such as?” I asked. “Aram — the one you sent to Baghdad — Eshraghi, and a few others,” he said, placing particular weight on Aram and Eshraghi, and asking whether I knew anything of their careers before they joined the Foreign Office. I said I did, and added that I did not take their pre-Ministry careers into account.

Their files showed nothing against them since their admission to the Ministry. “Your files are incomplete,” Fatemi said. “Aram was under suspicion by the secret police.” I answered that, as we had received no report against him from our own security authorities, I could take no action. Fatemi grew suddenly agitated, his hands shaking, and said loudly, “Mr. Meftah, you pretend not to know — you are feigning ignorance. You know perfectly well this Aram was Percy Sykes's private servant, and served in the South Persia Rifles hospital. Are those not reason enough to remove him?”

I replied, “Mr. Fatemi, if you want my honest opinion, I will give it to you plainly: anyone who has served foreigners should not, in my view, be admitted into government service — and least of all into the Foreign Office. But as I told you, his file records nothing of the kind, and the same is true of Eshraghi. Besides, as you know, there is precedent —

men who once worked for foreigners and later entered government service have risen as high as Prime Minister." He said again, loudly, "No, Mr. Meftah, that was not right." I asked, "What was not right — my opinion, or the practice itself?" "Your opinion is quite right," he said. "The practice was wrong." I told him I agreed with him entirely — the practice had indeed been wrong. And I reminded him that he must, by then, have known me well enough to know how sincerely I was attached to fairness and impartiality: if he could produce any genuine evidence that these were unreliable men, I would deal with them at once — but I warned him I could place no trust in unsupported secret-police reports, having no confidence in them whatsoever.

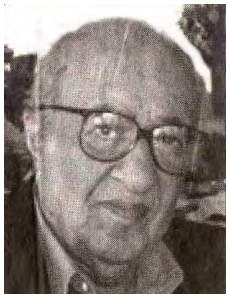
Shortly after Fatemi left for Germany, the files were returned to the Ministry and their review postponed for a more suitable time.

There was no doubt in my mind that the Foreign Office needed radical administrative reform before personnel reform could properly be tackled at all. Having toured Europe in 1936–37 to study how other foreign ministries were run, I had long been eager for the chance to bring about proper reform in our own, so that it could train efficient, dedicated patriots into well-prepared diplomats. I fully understood how urgently the Ministry needed trained officers of its own. Too often it found itself pressed by foreign powers to accept a non-career diplomat, or an outsider imposed on it by some higher personality — people who could never hold a post for long, and had to be recalled sooner or later for misconduct or other unpleasant behaviour.

During my own time as Undersecretary, the Ministry was once forced to seek agreement for just such a non-career appointment, and was asked, in turn, whether it truly had no one of its own with the diplomatic experience and training to propose instead.

Difficulties of this kind persisted, to my regret, even in the appointment of young and inexperienced men — the country bearing the considerable expense of shuffling them from post to post simply because they happened to be some senior figure's favourite.

Photographs for this chapter



Hossein Eshraghi

From Bad to Worse

While I was busy contending with the National Front over their politically motivated Foreign Office reforms, other complications troubled me still more.

First, there were divisions within the National Front itself, which weighed heavily on the Cabinet — a result of Dr. Mossadegh keeping away from Cabinet meetings, which were consequently always chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister: first Bagher Kazemi, and, after his departure as Ambassador to Paris, Dr. Sadighi.

That gloomy atmosphere in Cabinet bore down more and more heavily on the oil problem.

Second, the oil dispute itself had broken the country's financial and economic strength outright, producing intense public disappointment.

Third, the disorder and anarchy disrupting public life gave real advantage to the Tudeh (Communist) Party, letting them accelerate their subversive activities.

Public life in Tehran was so badly disrupted that shopkeepers whose custom I frequented kept asking me, “When will this hooliganism stop? How many more times a day must we pull our shutters up and down? Our business is paralysed, and we have large families to keep. You're in government — you must find some solution.”

After Allahyar Saleh was sent to Washington as Ambassador — or, more accurately, eased out of the National Front under that pretext — the crisis within the Front deepened to the point that Dr. Mossadegh's isolation was plain to see.

Differences between Bagher Kazemi and Fatemi on one side, and a sharp antipathy between Fatemi and Dr. Shayegan on the other, together with the tense relations between Dr. Mossadegh and Ayatollah Kashani, split public support down the middle. The older generation's sympathies lay with the Shah and Kashani; the younger were drawn more toward the Tudeh Party. I learned that the Tudeh Party was profiting from the crisis and working hard to strengthen its position. The newspapers of the two camps fanned the flames with the most inflammatory language against each other and against individuals, and the murkier the political waters grew, the easier it became for foreign powers to exploit the situation for their own ends.

Dr. Mossadegh, who had no sympathy for President Truman, whom he considered pro-British, waited eagerly for the American presidential election. As soon as Eisenhower was elected, he sent him a long telegram expressing his suspicion that Iran's situation might have been reported to the President inaccurately and unfairly. The President's reply rejected Mossadegh's suggestion.

I mentioned earlier that after Middleton's departure, Henderson's activity increased sharply — not to help settle the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, but to further American interests in Iran. This claim is easily borne out by the British press of November 1952, which did not hesitate to voice its anxiety over what was passing between Dr. Mossadegh and Henderson. The further 1952 advanced, and the nearer President Truman's administration came to its end, the more Britain's anxiety grew, since she now saw little chance of gaining anything through the Republicans.

From time to time the British press raised the spectre of Anglo-Russian collaboration over Iran — some warnings going so far as to suggest a revival of the old 1919 Anglo-Russian spheres-of-influence arrangement (see the London papers of November 1952). I followed these developments closely, and came to believe that if the problem continued unresolved, Iran risked becoming a second Korea.

Day by day the situation grew more dangerous. The government could show nothing positive for lack of funds — it was, quite simply, bankrupt; not a single rial could be found in the treasury, the savings banks, or anywhere else. Finally, the wise men and strategists of the National Front decided that, with Dr. Mossadegh's powers renewed by Parliament, the government should adopt a new tactic — producing what some eminent National Front members themselves called “psychological food” for the people. The government papers were instructed to launch the most vicious attacks on the Shah and the Royal Family. Two papers in particular, Fatemi's Bakhtar-e Emruz (“East Today”) and Karimpour Shirazi's Shooresh (“Uprising”), spared no vile language they could find.

I recall one day, when Bakhtar-e Emruz was in the thick of these attacks, meeting Fatemi and telling him that it was not fitting for a paper everyone knew he owned and edited — least of all while he held the post of Foreign Minister, appointed by the Shah's own decree — to behave in this way toward the Royal Family.

He looked at me, astonished, and said, “Funny you should say that — when I had an audience with the Shah this morning, he told me the very same thing.” I asked what he had replied. “I told the Shah that, since taking my Cabinet post, I had stopped overseeing the paper's affairs.” That, however, was a plain untruth — it was well known that Fatemi still directed the paper's political line.

I asked whether the Shah had seemed satisfied with the answer. “It was the truth, wasn't it?” he said. I told him I only wished him to know that such conduct did not suit a Foreign Minister, and that I wondered what foreign representatives made of it all.

Unfortunately, neither the Shah's remark nor my own had any effect on the government's behaviour. Its position had grown so poor that this appalling conduct became a kind of camouflage for its own decline. As certain National Front members put it, “psychological food” had to be prepared for the people — never realising that the food they were preparing was more destructive than a Molotov cocktail.

Fortunately, Ayatollah Kashani saw the danger and how to defuse it. He judged it best that the Shah and Queen Soraya take a trip to Shiraz.

The trip took place on 1st Azar 1331, 22nd November 1952. The Shah and Soraya were received with great ceremony, and I could see how much the trip angered the government and the National Front alike.

At the same time, the coup d'état in Iraq gave the government an occasion to organise demonstrations — not solely in support of events in Iraq, but also to stir up disorder, which the police used as cover to arrest a number of anti-Mossadegh figures. In short, looking back on those days in Tehran, the city had become little more than a stage for demonstrations by rival groups, each one aggravating the situation further.

These events, together with rumours that England and Russia had reached an understanding over Iran, deepened the government's anxiety. The remedy found by the wise men of the National Front was to extend the government's special powers still further, which Parliament passed under duress.

I heard from diplomats who had previously served in the Balkans that the events in Tehran resembled the conditions that had preceded revolution there, and they wondered whether the same tactics were being used in Iran. This news worried me still more, especially when word came that the government planned to close Parliament in the hope of reducing Kashani's influence — though his influence remained strong enough, for the moment, to block the plan.

From then on Dr. Mossadegh believed his life was in danger, and enclosed himself in what amounted to a safe cage. A high wall was built in front of the balcony of his room, which overlooked the garden of a neighbouring house — the very room in which he rested each evening and received visitors — and a steel door was fitted between two wooden ones leading into it. I asked him one day why the wall had gone up in front of the balcony. “I could easily be shot at from the trees in the garden opposite,” he said. That house, as it happened, belonged to Dr. Mossadegh himself, but was let to the Americans.

Matters continued to deteriorate. The National Front papers concentrated their propaganda on justifying a change of regime, so effectively that even those within the Palace began, it seemed, to count their days in the country. Word leaked out that Queen Soraya was gathering her private belongings — though those who knew her well never believed she cared much for staying in Iran, and thought she had simply seized a convenient pretext to leave.

On the 9th of Esfand 1331, 28th February 1953, I went to my office as usual. Before long, Fatemi's door opened and he called me in. He handed me an envelope and said, “Please ask the head of the Passport Office to bring his register and issue passports for these people. They must be ready, with the appropriate visas, before eleven o'clock. Let no one into your room, and keep the whole matter confidential.”

I returned to my office with the envelope. Inside was a letter from the Imperial Court and a number of photographs — among them, photographs of the Shah and Soraya, requesting passports for them both. Seeing the Shah's photograph there, and the secrecy demanded, made me deeply suspicious. Remembering the rumours that Soraya was packing her belongings, I now believed the Shah was indeed being forced to leave the country — and this time, permanently.

I called Mr. Shahidi, head of the Consular Department, and passed on the Minister's instructions, and told my private secretary to admit no one to my office. As Shahidi began the paperwork, I sat at my desk in deep anxiety, picturing the worst for my country — a Korean catastrophe repeated at home. Had they obtained Kashani's approval? Surely not — if the government had had Parliament's blessing, why handle the matter so secretly? And if Kashani did not know, who would tell him? I was still turning this over when my private secretary came in with a small leaflet bearing a communiqué from Kashani, which read something like this:

“The people should know that treacherous policies have driven our beloved, democratic Shah to decide to leave the country. He has resolved to leave today, the 9th of Esfand. You know that if the Shah leaves, everything we have will follow him. Run, then, and make him change his decision — for today our independence and our very existence depend solely on the person of His Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and on no one else.”

Kashani's declaration worked on me like the finest tonic; I felt at once relieved.

Fatemi must have received the same leaflet, for he soon came to my room, plainly worried, and asked whether the passports were ready — it was getting late, he said, and they had to be at the private Palace before eleven.

Roknedin Ashtiyani, Fatemi's private secretary, was ordered to take the passports round the embassies to obtain the necessary visas. They were handed to Fatemi at about ten o'clock; he endorsed them and gave them to Ashtiyani with strict instructions to have them at the private Palace no later than eleven.

As soon as I had Kashani's leaflet in hand, I sent an agent to the bazaar to telephone me regular reports on the public's reaction. The first call brought word that thousands of bazaaris were marching toward the Palace, chanting slogans in the Shah's favour and against his decision to leave.

By the time Ashtiyani reached the Palace with the passports, crowds already filled the streets leading to it, shouting that they did not want the country without its King. The crowd grew so dense that the guards had to shut the Palace gates.

Dr. Mossadegh and his Cabinet rushed to the Palace to bid the Shah farewell and see him off before matters got out of hand — not realising the Palace was already virtually surrounded by people. The Shah stood on the Palace steps waiting for the passports; cars stood packed and ready, heavy luggage had already gone ahead by lorry to England, and the Shah himself would have to travel by road.

I remained in my office, taking regular reports from my agent in the streets. The clock struck eleven with no news of the Shah's departure — which only increased my relief. At half past twelve I received the most striking news of all: an exchange of farewell messages between the Shah and Mossadegh. The Shah praised him warmly for his success, and promised his continued support and prayers. Dr. Mossadegh, in reply, thanked the Shah and said, “I repeatedly asked Your Majesty not to leave the country for medical treatment, but now that Your Majesty has decided to go, I assure you I shall return what has been entrusted to me safe and sound,” wishing him a speedy recovery and swift return. The Shah kissed Dr. Mossadegh goodbye.

But before the Shah could step into his car, the crowd around the Palace had grown so large, and its slogans against Dr. Mossadegh so hostile, that he was forced to slip out through the Palace's back door under the protection of the Palace guards.

Finally came the news that the Shah, to calm the angry crowds and disperse them, had decided to call off his departure altogether — the best news I could have hoped for.

My diary entry for that 9th of Esfand reads simply: “A worrying day for me.” I made that note because I could see clearly where my country was being pushed. With every misstep of the National Front and the government, I pictured Iran as a second Korea, and that fear kept me constantly on edge. I was not alone in my worry — Allahyar Saleh, Iran's Ambassador in Washington and a leading National Front figure, was, if anything, more anxious still. His state of mind is plain from a telegram I received from him the next day, which read roughly as follows:

“Why has what I spun unravelled again? A joint declaration should be issued at once by the Palace and the Prime Minister, stating that no difference of policy exists between them.”

Rather than heed that telegram and repair the damage done, an “Eight Man Committee” was formed to counter the popular uprising of 9th Esfand against Mossadegh's government — which enjoyed Kashani's support, as Speaker of Parliament — by staging artificial strikes and issuing statements meant to prepare the ground for dissolving Parliament altogether, so as to be rid of Kashani. In short, the agitation grew day by day, deepening public unease.

At the same time, Dr. Mossadegh's habit of keeping even the National Front leadership — Fatemi especially — uninformed of his conversations with Henderson over the oil question created real resentment among them. I had long felt that Dr. Mossadegh kept the National Front in the dark on the oil negotiations and the political affairs surrounding them.

Henderson called on me from time to time. On one such visit he related what had passed between himself and Dr. Mossadegh over the oil question. I asked whether he had informed the Foreign Minister of their conversation, or wished me to do so. He put a finger to his lips, made a hushing sound, and said, “You being an old hand at the Foreign Office, I would not want to go over your head — but not a word to him,” meaning Fatemi.

On another occasion I had further reason to suspect Mossadegh was acting entirely on his own. One morning in Esfand 1331 (February or March 1953), as I set off for the office, my driver mentioned he had heard from the Minister's own driver that Fatemi was ill in bed at home. This surprised me — when I had left him the evening before, he had seemed perfectly well and made no complaint. Sensing something must have happened after I left, I had the driver take me to

the Minister's house instead. I found him in bed, though nothing in his face suggested any real illness — only a certain gloom. I told him as much, and asked whether something had happened after I left him the day before.

"Yes," he said. "I went to see Dr. Mossadegh. His private secretary told me Henderson was with him. I said it made no difference — please tell the Prime Minister I am here and would like to see him. The man came back with the message: Mr. Henderson is with me; if there is anything urgent I should know, I shall ask the Ambassador to step into another room, but otherwise your business can wait. I was so angry I came straight home, and I have decided I am not going back to the Ministry."

This was further proof that Dr. Mossadegh kept both the National Front and Parliament uninformed of his handling of the oil question — and of our international relations generally. After Fatemi left for Hamburg for medical treatment, Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee summoned me to appear before it, its first order of business being to question me on the state of the country's international relations.

Messrs. Razavi and Parsa, both National Front members, criticised the Foreign Ministry sharply for failing to keep Parliament informed — particularly, they said, over the oil affair — insisting it had been my duty to come and brief them. I sat before the Committee between Dr. Fakher and Mr. Zolfaghari, the latter, sensing my temper rising under their attack and knowing my character well, repeatedly touching my knee as a signal to stay calm. I bore their criticism, unjust as it was, but paid no heed to Zolfaghari's warning, and said, "I cannot understand why you gentlemen are attacking me, or the Foreign Office. You are both members of the National Front — why not put this to the Prime Minister, your own leader? Your criticism is entirely unjust." Razavi pressed on, more forcefully still: "No, that is not right. It is your duty to inform Parliament, and your conduct amounts to a failure of that duty."

Those last words — a failure of duty — angered me. "The Foreign Office itself was not informed of the country's foreign relations," I replied. "How, then, could I inform Parliament of what we ourselves did not know?" Razavi asked since when the Ministry had been kept in the dark. "Since Razmara," I said, naming the previous Prime Minister, "the Foreign Office has been kept out of foreign relations entirely — we cannot report to Parliament what we are not told ourselves."

That same afternoon, Dr. Mossadegh summoned me and criticised the way I had spoken before the Committee. I asked whether what I had said was untrue. He admitted it was not, but said I should not have spoken so frankly. I told him I had considered it my duty to defend my Ministry.

These two episodes illustrate a single point: that Dr. Mossadegh kept neither his own Foreign Minister, nor the National Front, nor Parliament properly informed of our foreign relations — least of all on the question of oil.

The divisions within the National Front on one hand, and the country's deepening unrest on the other — which gave the Tudeh Party ever more room for sabotage — worried me more than ever. What was more, the pro-government and National Front press, and Dr. Mossadegh himself, went to ever greater extremes in attacking the Shah in speeches and articles. This deeply unhealthy climate made it plain to me that neither the setback of 9th Esfand nor Saleh's telegram had taught the National Front anything: they pressed on with their plan to force the Shah's abdication, and it seemed to me as clear as day that his abdication would bring general disorder, and quite possibly the disintegration of my homeland.

I thought it best, first and foremost, to find some way of reconciling the Shah and Mossadegh — perhaps through a kind of King's Council that could mediate between the Shah and either the National Front leadership or Dr. Mossadegh himself. My second thought, should the first plan fail, was to seek the help of Ayatollah Borujerdi, the highest Shia religious authority. With little real hope for my first idea, I thought it wise to prepare the ground for a meeting with Borujerdi through Mr. Rashed, the well-known cleric and preacher. To pursue the first plan, I met with Mr. Ala, the Minister of the Imperial Court, who welcomed the suggestion and promised to consider it.

The Persian New Year (Norouz — "new day") of 1332, 20th–21st March 1953, brought fresh energy to both sides. During the first week of Farvardin (March), I called on Mr. Macky to offer New Year's greetings and spoke to him of the need to bring peace between the two parties. "I fully agree," he said, "and to prove it, I met Dr. Mossadegh myself a few days ago on this very subject. After a long conversation he agreed to go and see the Shah, to settle the quarrel between them. But before I left, Fatemi arrived and asked what news there was. Mossadegh told him what had passed, and that he intended to see the Shah. On hearing this, Fatemi threw up his hands and said, 'Oh, never — never! We have decided to settle this matter once and for all!' I left the room in anger, seeing that with Fatemi involved, nothing could

be done.” Macky's account left me deeply depressed, and I concluded there was no course left but to press ahead with a King's Council, and to seek Borujerdi's help.

I met Mr. Ala again and pressed him to give the establishment of a King's Council serious consideration. We arranged to meet at his home on the afternoon of the 3rd of Ordibehesht (April) to draw up a list of candidates, and I suggested Abdollah Entezam join us as well.

At about ten o'clock on the appointed morning, I received a telephone call from Mr. Ala. “Mr. Meftah,” he said, “I wanted only to tell you that today's meeting is off.” Startled, I asked why. “Have you not heard? I have resigned.” I felt a wave of unease, and thought to myself: what bad luck we have — it is as though the country is condemned to fall apart.

I consoled myself with the hope that whoever succeeded him as Minister of the Imperial Court might prove someone I could work with, or a good mediator in his own right. Before long, word came that Mr. Abolghasem Amini had been chosen as acting Minister of the Imperial Court. I set about learning what I could of the reasons behind his appointment, for I could not see in him the qualities I had hoped for — and my inquiries confirmed that he arrived with a plan of his own, one quite at odds with my own peace-seeking, patriotic efforts.

After that, the only path left open to me was Ayatollah Borujerdi, as I watched the situation racing toward a danger I could no longer predict. The following day — after Dr. Mossadegh's speech of 17th Farvardin (6th April 1953), Amini's appointment, and the assassination of General Afshartous, the Chief of Police, and his funeral — everything had the air of a drowning man clutching at whatever he could reach.

It was around this time that I felt truly sorry to be in Tehran at all — all the more so as I sensed Fatemi's own growing discontent; he was already looking for a way out, under the pretext of failing health that required him to return to Germany for his doctor's care, and spoke now and then of his willingness to take a post in Europe, preferably the Embassy in Rome, if it could be arranged. He finally left for Germany on 10th Khordad 1332, 31st May 1953, ostensibly to consult his doctor and seek treatment.

Shortly after Fatemi's departure, I went, with Entezam, to see Borujerdi in Qom. He believed the National Front would not repeat its earlier mistake, given its defeat on 9th Esfand. I explained the situation to him and made clear that the government had lost control of the country's affairs, to the point that the Tudeh Party was almost its master. I stressed that if the Tudeh Party succeeded, Iran would become another country behind the Iron Curtain, where religion, independence, and every national tradition and symbol would be made to be forgotten. Borujerdi listened attentively, visibly troubled, and promised to see what he could do.

Leaving his house with little real consolation, I saw Tudeh slogans painted on the wall facing his gate — “Long Live the Tudeh Republic” — repeated all along the lanes leading to it. I wondered how the people of so religious a town as Qom, home to a man as powerful as Borujerdi, could allow such slogans right at his gate and all the way to the shrine. Was his authority already fading so fast that no one in Qom dared erase them?

In that state of unease, and with little real faith left in what Borujerdi could achieve, we left Qom for Tehran, after visiting the shrine and my mother's grave.

Upheaval and disturbance grew by the day; the government's own unease and anxiety were plain to see. All that remained to the National Front and its papers was to go on abusing and insulting the Shah, the Royal Family, and anyone they judged to stand against them.

The number of pro-government papers fell fast, and even some that had once been fiercely pro-Mossadegh turned on him — Syasat-e-Ma, for one, took to calling him “the blanket-sheltered leader,” criticising him for extracting a vote of confidence through arm-twisting and threats of resignation, and warning that such obstinacy and vindictiveness would end badly.

In short, the government's demand to extend its special powers under duress, Macky's resignation from Parliament — itself a signal that he was leaving the National Front — and a hundred other troubles besides, all pointed to the government's setback in its general policy.

Photographs for this chapter



Ayatollah Kashani



Karimpour Shirazi



Student demonstration in Tehran



Allahyar Saleh



Henderson



Ayatollah Hossein Broujerdi



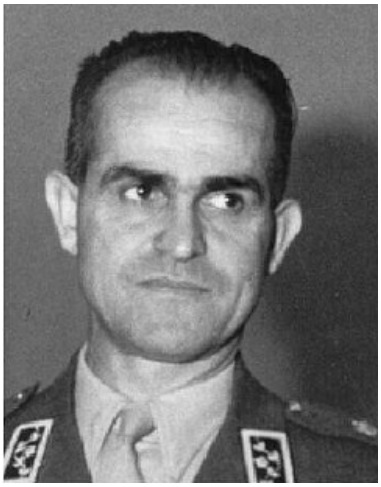
Hossein Macky and Mozafar Baghaee



Hossein Ala



Abolghasem Amini



General Afshartous



First Mossadegh Cabinet, from right to left: General Nadhdi (Minister of War), M. A. Varasteh (Minister of Finance), Bagher Kazemi (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy PM), Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh (Prime Minister), Dr. Loghman Adham (Minister of Health), Ali Heyat (Minister of Justice), Ziya-al-Molk Farmand (Minister of Agriculture), Amir Homayoun Boushehri (Minister of Roads), General Fazlollah Zahedi (Minister of Interior), Dr. Karim Sanjabi (Minister of Education)

Plan for a Military Operation Against Iraq

It was about 6 AM on Friday, 5th Tir (26th June) 1953, when I received a telephone call from Dr. Mossadegh asking me to come to his house at once. He wanted to tell me that a commission would meet at the Interior Ministry the following day at noon, and that I was to attend.

I asked what the commission concerned, so that I might prepare myself. “It does not matter,” Mossadegh replied. “You will find out when you are there.” I asked whether the Foreign Ministry had any prior knowledge of it. He gave the same answer, and his manner made clear he had nothing further to say. I left, turning over the events of the past few days, but could think of nothing that might concern both Ministries jointly — I ran through every frontier incident I could recall, without finding any reason for a meeting at the Interior Ministry. I wondered whether it might be something like the Northern Fisheries matter, where my own suggestion had been adopted — except that in that case, I had at least been briefed beforehand. I passed a very uneasy night. The next day I asked every department of the Ministry to report any outstanding business with the Interior Ministry; nothing unusual came back. I turned over the foreign press coverage in my mind, especially the reports forecasting a Korean-style fate for Iran, which made me shudder — but none of it touched on the Interior Ministry either, and gave me no clue at all.

I left my office at 11.45 AM to be there by noon. At Dr. Sadighi's office, the attendant said the Minister was expecting me and opened the door. Inside, I found General Riahi, Chief of the General Staff, already present, which unsettled me further — I thought, what is he doing here? We sat around a small table.

Dr. Sadighi opened with a long speech lasting nearly an hour, on what the government had done and what remained to be done — and on the obstacles that stood in the way of the government fulfilling its patriotic duty: obstacles created by spies, foreign ones especially, whose network and centre we would have to destroy in order to give the government a free hand to achieve its aims. General Riahi and I listened carefully throughout, without offering any opinion of our own.

Then Dr. Sadighi turned to me and said, “Mr. Meftah, listen carefully from here on, because your opinion on this subject is essential.” I strained to follow closely, all the while wondering: where, exactly, was this nest of spies we were apparently going to bomb?

He turned to me again. “Mr. Meftah, if we know that a certain foreign power is acting against the interests of our government and people, what should be done — what is the procedure?” I replied, “If there is evidence, it should be sent to my Ministry, so that we can summon the representative of the country concerned and warn him to halt activities that risk damaging our relations.”

“And if we have done that, and the misconduct continues — what then?” I told him I would summon their representative and hand him a formal note of protest. “And if that brings no satisfactory result?” I said I would send a stronger note, warning that continuation of such conduct would force a severance of relations, for which the responsibility would be theirs.

Dr. Sadighi only repeated the same question! I told him I would then send an ultimatum, warning that continued interference in our internal affairs would lead to a rupture in diplomatic relations, and that if the misconduct persisted, I would suspend relations after a stated time limit.

“And if, even after we suspend relations, they go on sending spies and interfering — what then?”

Hearing that, I pictured a state of affairs more terrifying than Korea itself. After two hours of being battered by these unnerving questions, I was in real agony of mind. The government had no proof of its claims — none, at least, that I had been shown. I had, admittedly, summoned the Iraqi Ambassador to my office several times over press reports of British spies operating out of Iraq, protesting that his country was being used as a base for spying against us — protests he always denied, dismissing the press reports as mere provocation.

I decided there was no use letting my nerves get the better of me, so I tried to set out my view logically. “So our real opponent is England, and the nest of spies is in Iraq — and we intend to destroy it by force of arms?”

“Yes,” said Dr. Sadighi.

I told him that any such operation required three things to be in place. First, military readiness in every respect — a matter for the Chief of the General Staff — and, turning to General Riahi, I asked whether he was prepared to take on that responsibility. He gave no answer.

Second, such an operation required money — and where was it to come from? We had spent a long time trying, without success, simply to get the Russians to hand back Bank Melli's gold, and I knew the government's finances were in a very poor state.

Third — and this was my own particular concern — there was the political dimension. I had to draw attention to the country's geography: just as Russia regarded Iran as a buffer state, so did the Western powers, who had spoken of it as a stepping-stone or bridge, and even as a Mediterranean or African outpost, more particularly as a defensive point for oil. If an Iranian soldier so much as set foot across the frontier, we would face heavy resistance from the British air force stationed in Iraq, and the bitter hostility of Nuri al-Said, under the pretext that British oil interests were threatened — and we would be branded the aggressor. Yet the moment a British soldier set foot on our side of the frontier, Russia, citing the 1921 Agreement and claiming her own outpost was under threat, would enter Iran — and we would have created, in effect, a second Korea. What a strange policy that would be!

General Riahi noted what I had said, but my reasoning only angered Dr. Sadighi, who raised his arms and said, “Mr. Meftah, we must prepare some psychological food for the people!”

That extraordinary phrase left me more uneasy than ever — was the “psychological food” he meant simply a hot bullet, meant for the very people it claimed to nourish?! I got up and left the meeting with a deeply troubled mind.

It was late afternoon; the heat of July, an empty stomach, and the anxiety the meeting had stirred combined to paint the most devastating picture of the country's future — one far worse than Korea's. I could not afterward recall how I drove the seventeen kilometres home safely, my mind so torn with worry. I lived up in Darband, a hill town north of Tehran, and all the way home I turned over the thought that, before such a dangerous policy could be put into practice, I had better resign and leave the country with my wife and children. With the Minister away from Tehran, people already looked to me as though I were responsible for foreign policy — a policy the Foreign Office was never even told about — and I thought it better to leave the government entirely than be associated with so extraordinary a decision.

In this troubled state I reached home about 3 PM. My wife, seeing me back far earlier than usual — I normally lunched in town, working at my office until about nine — was startled by my agitation. Had I eaten? What had happened, that I was home so early? She hardly gave me time to answer before pressing on: had I quarrelled with someone again? Had I resigned, or been dismissed? “Why don't you answer?” she finally asked. “You haven't given me the chance,” I said. “I have not resigned, nor been dismissed, nor had lunch. I am very tired and would like to rest, and then I shall think what

is best to do." She went off to prepare some food, murmuring, "He hasn't resigned yet — and then he'll think what's best to do!" Meanwhile I undressed and lay down, deep in the most frightening thoughts.

Before long she returned with a tray of light food, set it down, and asked again what I had meant about not yet resigning and thinking what was best. I told her not to worry — nothing had happened, it was only the heat and too much work, and that I would take a cold shower and feel better. She left the room while I ate, still wrestling with my own thoughts. I rested an hour, then showered — and was still under the water when the telephone rang. My wife took the call: it was Dr. Mossadegh's private secretary, asking me to come see the Prime Minister at once.

I left in a hurry, my mind racing the whole way — were we about to quarrel? Was he going to dismiss me from my post? If so, I thought, I should be grateful for it, and prepare to leave the country. In this uncertain state I reached Mossadegh's house and was shown to his room. As we exchanged greetings, I sensed the atmosphere was not as tense as I had feared. He asked me to sit and said, "Did you attend this morning's commission at the Interior Ministry, as I asked?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well — what happened?" (Khob, cheh shod?)

I did not care for that phrase, cheh shod. After a brief pause, looking at him rather strangely, I gathered myself and said, "Has the Chief of the General Staff not yet reported the commission's proceedings to you?" Dr. Mossadegh studied me for a few seconds and said, "Yes. I liked your argument, and I agree with you."

I cannot describe the relief and happiness I felt. Those two sentences soothed my nerves better than any sedative could have.

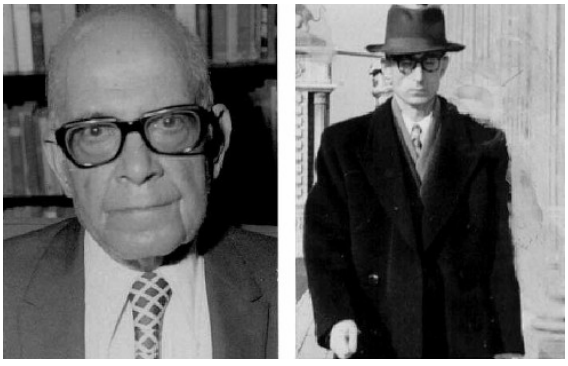
Sensing the effect his words had had, Mossadegh added, "I simply wanted to tell you that I liked your reasoning, and that your view was the correct one."

I left him as happy as a man emerging victorious from a hard-fought contest, deeply proud to have helped spare my country from certain disaster.

Strangely, in that moment I remembered a comforting remark made to me long before by Soheili, after my return from Quetta following the devastating earthquake of 1935: "Meftah, with your patriotism, God has spared you for our country, to fulfil some important duty — and that will be your best reward."

Was this the duty I had been spared to fulfil? If so, I have every reason to be proud, and grateful to the Almighty.

Photographs for this chapter



Dr. Shayegan and Dr. Sadighi



General Riahi

Lavrentiev Replaced Sadtchikof

The days of July 1953 advanced quickly, bringing some new, unnerving event almost every day — enough that I began taking sleeping pills each night simply to be fit for work the next morning.

On the very day of that commission meeting, I received a telegram from Arasteh, our Ambassador in Moscow, reporting that he had been summoned to the Soviet Foreign Ministry and handed a note verbale on settling the frontier differences between our two countries.

Receiving that telegram just before the new Russian Ambassador, Lavrentiev, was due to arrive gave me pause — I suspected he must be coming with specific instructions on the frontier dispute, or Moscow would surely have waited until he reached Tehran. I also recalled the warnings of certain diplomats in Tehran who had previously served in the Balkans and knew Lavrentiev's record there — he was known, they said, as something of a professional instigator of revolution.

I genuinely regretted Sadtchikof's departure. On several occasions I had discussed with him the need for friendly relations between our two countries, and I felt he had taken my sincere suggestions seriously. I had hoped that through him we might settle many of our problems amicably, as we had with the Northern Fisheries question — a matter Fatemi had been deeply pessimistic about, telling me one day, opposing my view, “Mr. Meftah, we cannot fight on two fronts.” I set my own view down on paper regardless and put it to Dr. Mossadegh; it was accepted and carried out without ever opening a second front.

Knowing what I did of Lavrentiev's reputation, the day Sadtchikof came to say farewell — 29th June — was a genuinely sad one for me, as I worried over how his successor would behave. I suspected the Russians, weighing Iran's instability alongside the deep divisions within the National Front, had found the perfect moment to repeat the mischief they had worked so successfully in the Balkans — sending Lavrentiev, a master of that game, to Tehran to watch events and, should revolution break out, steer it toward Russian ends with the Tudeh Party's tacit help. No one, certainly, was better suited to that task than a man with his record of engineering revolutions in the Balkans.

The delay in answering Moscow's telegram angered Fatemi, then still in Europe for medical treatment. He telegraphed urgently that a warm reply accepting the Russian proposal should be sent at once, arguing that any delay would give Britain a chance to sabotage it. In the end, a warm reply went to Moscow proposing a joint commission to study the differences in Tehran. On the 9th of Amordad, 31st July 1953, Moscow's reply confirmed that our proposal was accepted, and that the new Ambassador had been given the necessary instructions, to be worked out after his arrival.

During this exchange of telegrams, the 30th Tir procession took place, which encouraged the Russians — and quite possibly it was that very event that prompted the warm reply to Moscow. Lavrentiev, no doubt, took it as a welcome omen for himself!

The government marked that date with a great march-past of different political parties in front of the Bakhtar-e Emruz building. To avoid clashes, it was arranged that the National Front would march in the morning and the Tudeh Party in the afternoon. The government had expected at least 12,000 National Front supporters for the morning march, but by my own count barely a thousand turned out. I recall one Minister asking my opinion of the numbers — his tone made clear he expected an inflated figure, and to please him I said, “About two or three thousand.” He grew visibly uncomfortable and said, “Mr. Meftah, there should be twelve thousand.” I only repeated, “That is my estimate.” He seemed not to have considered that Parliament Square, with its large central garden, could never have held twelve thousand people in any case. The amusing part was that the eight hundred or thousand people I actually saw were mostly soldiers in civilian clothes, shouting slogans on cue.

That afternoon, however, when it was the Tudeh Party's turn to march, police reports counted a well-organised procession of thirty thousand — a show of strength that frightened the public and alarmed the government in equal measure.

The next day, in the waiting room of Mossadegh's house, I spoke with the Chief of Police about the 30th Tir marches. He admitted freely that splitting the two parties' marches had been a mistake — had they marched one after the other, no one would have noticed just how strong the Tudeh's numbers really were.

There was no doubt Lavrentiev took that show of force as a welcome omen for himself!

Lavrentiev came to the Foreign Ministry on 5th Amordad (27th July) at 12.30 to present a copy of his credentials, and informed me that a Minister Plenipotentiary named Orlov, with an assistant named Vorolin holding the rank of First

Secretary, would shortly arrive to join the commission. He presented his credentials to the Shah at Saad Abad Palace on 10th Amordad (1st August 1953); the two Russian officials arrived the same day — and, on that very same day, Foad Rohani, legal adviser to the Oil Company, left for Geneva — where he was unable to find the very person he had gone to meet!

Photographs for this chapter





Sadtchikof and Mossadegh

Referendum

Strange events came thick and fast, one after another. Among the strangest was the now-famous referendum, by which Dr. Mossadegh, after denouncing the resolution of the Eight-Man Committee, took it upon himself to put his wishes to the people directly, rather than to Parliament.

On 30th Amordad (3rd August), Dr. Mossadegh's private secretary telephoned to remind me not to miss that evening's Cabinet meeting. I assumed something concerning the Foreign Ministry was on the agenda. Once the meeting began, however, I found the question of a referendum under discussion — the idea being to give Cabinet's own resolution the power to authorise one. The necessary decree had already been drafted; the discussion was, in effect, only for form's sake. I found myself uneasy over its legality, made an excuse, and left the room without returning.

The next day, a member of the Prime Minister's office came to my room with the referendum file, saying I had “forgotten” to sign the meeting's resolution, and had brought it for my signature. I refused, on the grounds that Undersecretaries did not generally sign Cabinet resolutions. He offered several precedents that did not satisfy me, and argued that, in the Minister's absence, I was Acting Minister and could sign. Perhaps I could have — but that did not make it lawful. It is worth remembering that it was the National Front itself that had introduced the practice of governing by referendum.

Bagher Kazemi, who was at the time both Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, saw the situation approaching a critical point, and, taking advantage of Fatemi's absence — Fatemi being his personal enemy —

arranged to leave Tehran as Ambassador to France. With Fatemi away, Dr. Kaviani used the opening to press Dr. Shayegan into taking his place, positioning himself to replace me as well.

Meanwhile, Abolghasem Panahi, newly returned from India, came to see me with a verbal proposal from Middleton, then in New Delhi, concerning the oil dispute. I asked Panahi why the proposal had not been put in writing, since Dr. Mossadegh might simply refuse to credit it otherwise. Panahi said he had indeed asked Middleton to write it down, but Middleton had refused, saying that Dr. Mossadegh had used every previous proposal purely as propaganda for himself, without giving any of them serious attention, and he was sure this one would meet the same fate. Middleton had said he would be willing to put it in writing only if he could be certain Mossadegh would take it seriously.

I went at once to Mossadegh's house and relayed what Panahi had told me. Two days later I received a private and confidential letter from the late Mohsen Medhat, our Chargé d'Affaires in Karachi, enclosing a copy of an English proposal sent to Dr. Mossadegh — first through the Swedish Embassy in London, then via Mirza Esmail Entezam, on 8th Amordad (30th July) 1953 — which had received no acknowledgment at all, to the surprise of everyone aware of it.

I took the proposal to Dr. Mossadegh and offered my view that it deserved serious study. He took it without a word and tossed it onto his bed — from his expression, I gathered he already knew of it.

The essential points of the proposal, as I recall them, were these: first, the creation of a board of management with nine members nominated by the government — six Iranian, three foreign businessmen or financial experts, men of the calibre of Dr. Schacht; second, a general manager, appointed by the government on the Board's recommendation, to handle executive matters; third, the Board would negotiate with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company over its claim for compensation — one suggestion being that the Company accept the role of sole selling agent for Iranian oil abroad, treating its commission as satisfying its claim for the unexpired portion of the concession.

These were the outstanding points, as best I remember them. We had to face a fact Mirza Esmail himself had noted in writing: it was simply impossible for Iran to market its own oil abroad — we had neither the organisation nor the tankers such an undertaking would require. There was no question that Dr. Mossadegh had received this proposal; why he chose not to take it seriously is a question worth studying in its own right.

Did he feel some awkwardness before Henderson? Did the desperate state of the government's finances make him feel its days were numbered regardless? Or did he simply fear his fiercely anti-British friends within the National Front? One thing seemed obvious to me: no future Iranian government would ever receive such a proposal again — and none did.

It is possible Dr. Mossadegh was playing a longer game with America and England, hoping to attract enough Soviet sympathy to recover the Bank Melli gold that had sat in Moscow since the war, so as to improve the country's finances and fund further propaganda besides. His telegrams to Moscow would seem to support that reading.

Moscow, for its part, was plainly unwilling to move without conditions attached — having Dr. Azar in the Cabinet was not enough on its own. Russia was, I suspect, counting on Lavrentiev, since his presence in Tehran had already doubled Tudeh Party activity and revived hopes of a Tudeh government.

In Tehran, everyone believed Mossadegh was courting the Russians in hope of their assistance — a belief that deepened public anxiety, and American concern in equal measure, as was plain from Eisenhower's speech to the Council of Governors, in which he said openly that Dr. Mossadegh, in trying to rid himself of Parliament, had turned to the Communist Party for help — a dangerous course for America, since, as he put it, if the free world lost that part of the world, how could it hope to hold on to the wealth of Indonesia? (Eisenhower's speech of 1st August 1953.)

Yet none of this had any effect on the Iranian government. Mossadegh, or the National Front playing several tables at once, had eroded everyone's confidence, leaving the field wide open for the Tudeh Party — to Russia's evident satisfaction.

Fatemi hurried back from Europe to take the chair of the commission on Iran's differences with Russia. He arrived on 10th August, and the Iran–Soviet Commission opened on 15th August. The Iranian side was represented by Fatemi and myself, the Russian side by Lavrentiev, Orlov, and Vorolin.

The first meeting's discussion turned on drawing up an agenda. Lavrentiev, relying on Moscow's earlier contact with our own Embassy there, argued the agenda should open with the frontier differences, financial matters to follow.

Fatemi countered that the agenda should follow the declaration stating that whatever order the Iranian government chose would be acceptable to the Soviets — so we put the financial question first, the frontier differences second, along with other matters the declaration had not specified.

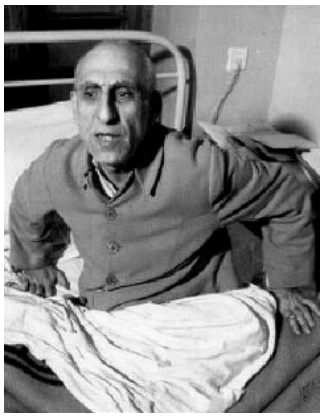
Fatemi's real aim was to open with the Bank Melli gold held in Russian banks. Lavrentiev's view was that the gold was purely a matter between the two banks, entirely separate from frontier or other disputes. The first meeting closed without any agreement on the agenda. The next, on 26th Amordad (17th August 1953), reached no agreement either.

I came to feel that, once in Tehran, Lavrentiev sensed Mossadegh's position was deteriorating fast — particularly once the events of 17th August handed the Tudeh Party further initiative — and so he was in no hurry at all to reach any serious conclusion.

Photographs for this chapter



Mossadegh taking his case to the people in front of Parliament



Mossadegh in his working bed



National Front members in good days

Blood Round the Peacock Throne

Amordad 1332 — 23rd July to 22nd August 1953 — proved, like the same month the year before, an unlucky one for Dr. Mossadegh's government. Following the Tudeh Party's impressive march-past of 21st July, the National Front had turned to the Tudeh for support — support that frightened the public, hardened anti-Mossadegh sentiment, and deepened public disorder.

The guard on Saad Abad Palace, the Shah's summer residence, was reduced, even as protection around Mossadegh's own house was heavily reinforced. The government's reasoning behind this was much debated; leaving the Palace's extensive grounds to a small, lightly armed detachment made the Shah suspicious enough that he and the Queen flew to Ramsar, on the Caspian coast.

With the new Russian Ambassador, Anatoly Lavrentiev, now in place, the Tudeh Party felt itself stronger than ever. Ranged against it, the influence of Borujerdi combined with that of Kashani, Speaker of Parliament, together with the departure of a number of the National Front's own senior figures, emboldened the opposition.

What was needed now was a strong army officer capable of directing the pro-Shah elements within the military. General Zahedi, then in hiding in a village north of Tehran to evade Mossadegh's search for him, was chosen for the task.

Two royal decrees were issued — one dismissing Mossadegh, the other appointing General Zahedi as Prime Minister in his place. Colonel Nassiri, commanding officer of the Imperial Guard, was ordered to deliver both decrees personally. Before he could do so, however, he arrested three of Mossadegh's advisers, Fatemi among them — but

Nassiri himself was then arrested by pro-Mossadegh officers guarding Mossadegh's house as he tried to deliver the Shah's decree, and the three advisers were released on the order of General Riahi, the Chief of the General Staff.

Word of the affair reached the Shah in Ramsar, and he judged it necessary to leave the country at once, piloting his own plane from Ramsar to Baghdad and then on to Rome.

The Shah's departure gave the National Front fresh material for its anti-Shah propaganda — though it also demonstrated plainly to the public that the National Front stood against both the Shah and the monarchy itself, and that the Tudeh Party was fast overtaking the National Front's own influence.

There was no doubt that Borujerdi's great religious standing, joined to Kashani's popular influence, sharpened the campaign against Mossadegh's supporters and the Tudeh Party alike, and helped bring about their eventual downfall.

With the royal decree dismissing Mossadegh and installing Zahedi in his place, the crisis went from bad to worse. Nowhere in the Tudeh Party's slogans did Mossadegh's name appear any longer — instead the cry was “Long live the Tudeh Republic.” The only National Front slogan I saw, hung from the railings of Parliament, read: “We shall take bloody revenge on the enemies of anti-colonialism.”

Fatemi, following his detention on 16th August, gave himself over to such a fury of revenge that he arranged for daily insults against the Shah and the Royal Family to run in his papers and in his own speeches before Parliament, and directed his brother, Saeed Fatemi, to help tear down Reza Shah's statue in the middle of Parliament Square.

The following day, as I entered my office, the Director of Information Services, Mr. Kafai — later Ambassador to Ankara — came to me in some agitation to say the Minister had ordered his speech of the previous day, delivered in Parliament Square, be circulated at once to all our representatives abroad. Having, like every other day, been far too busy the day before to read the papers, I had no idea what Fatemi had actually said. I asked Mr. Kafai why the speech was so urgent that it needed circulating in such haste; he explained it contained fierce insults against the Shah. I told him to draft the minute for the circular and bring it to me — and that if the Minister asked after it again, he should simply say it was with me, awaiting signature. When Kafai brought the draft, now knowing its contents, I took it and locked it in my safe. He looked at me strangely, said nothing, and I told him only, “Do as I've said. If he asks, tell him it's with me.”

No sooner had Kafai left my office than Fatemi summoned him and asked after the circular. Kafai told him it was with Mr. Meftah, awaiting my signature to authorise its release.

What puzzled me throughout my time working with Fatemi was his consistently guarded manner toward me — perhaps because of how frankly and openly I had spoken with him back in Hamburg, through which he had come to know I was no “yes man.” I had, besides, once had a rather serious conversation with him about the foul language regularly used in his paper, Bakhtar-e Emruz.

No sooner had Kafai left than my telephone rang — our Embassy in Baghdad. The Counsellor was on the line to say that Ambassador Aalam wished to speak with me. Guessing what he intended to ask, I said simply, “Tell him to contact the Minister.”

Aalam had, it turned out, asked Fatemi what his duty was toward the Shah, now in Baghdad. Fatemi told him he owed no obligation to a “Shah on the run” (shah-e-farari).

I bore Aalam no ill will over this, nor did I have any part in the conduct of Mr. Khajenouri and others (Khajenouri, for no reason I could discern, was afterward quite angry with me over it). Both men were responsible for their own behaviour — the Shah had neither abdicated, nor been legally deposed by any lawful authority, and no instruction whatsoever had been issued from Tehran to our representatives abroad on the matter. Their conduct, along with that of Bagher Kazemi and Abbas Farouhar, can only be put down to a certain ethical weakness, or simple flattery of Dr. Mossadegh.

The events of the three days from 16th to 19th August — not least the extraordinary public reception given the Shah on his return from Rome, which might fairly be read as a referendum in itself — were fully covered in the Iranian and foreign press of the time, and I need not repeat that account here.

But from what I myself witnessed during those three days in Tehran, I can say truthfully that blood ran round the Peacock Throne.

The first of that bloodshed, which took place directly in front of the Foreign Ministry, may perhaps be worth setting down for the record.

On 19th August I left home for the office as usual. As I neared the city centre, I felt an unease among people greater than usual. Most shops were still shuttered; those that were open had their shutters only half raised, their owners standing watchfully in the doorway. From the Pahlavi–Naderi crossroads southward, there were more soldiers, gendarmes and police on the streets than the day before. The buildings of the General Staff and the Ministry of War, and the streets leading to them, were heavily guarded by troops, and the whole town had a visibly nervous air — anyone passing those two buildings was watched closely by the soldiers stationed there.

Inside the Foreign Ministry, everyone seemed on edge. I asked one of the office attendants whether anything unusual was afoot. “Yes,” he said — reports from the southern part of the city and the bazaar indicated shopkeepers were closing their doors. I asked whether the Minister had arrived. Not yet, came the answer. I went into my office and set to work. My private secretary soon confirmed what the attendant had said, and I asked the Chief of Press and Information to send a reporter out on foot to keep me informed by telephone of events in the town — the Tehran bazaar had always been the centre of political agitation, where the clergy's influence ran deepest.

Before long the reporter telephoned to say that some ten thousand people had set out from the south of the city and were advancing north, their numbers swelling at every junction, carrying photographs of the Shah and chanting “Javid Shah” — “Long live the King.”

At about 9.30, the first gunfire was heard from Sepah Square. Shortly after, the Minister's attendant reported that Fatemi had arrived at his office but, after a brief telephone call, left again in haste. The attendant was still in my room when the reporter called again, this time from Parliament Square, saying the square was thronged with people arriving from the south, and that the Bakhtar-e Emruz newspaper building had been set on fire. I also received word that large crowds, armed with sticks, were advancing along several of the city's main streets, all chanting the same slogan. I ordered the Ministry's gates shut and the police guard kept alert, and asked Police Headquarters for additional officers to protect the building. The officer I spoke to told me plainly, “Your Excellency, we do not have enough police even to protect ourselves — you will have to make do with what you have.”

It was about one o'clock when I heard “Javid Shah” being chanted close to the Ministry itself. Most of the Directors had by then vanished; only two of them, along with my brother, G. H. Meftah, remained with me. We moved to the northern side of the building, where the windows overlooked the street leading to the Officers' Club and General Staff headquarters. The street was barred by two lines of soldiers under two commanding officers. A group of people advanced from the east, a young man at their head carrying a large photograph of the Shah, all chanting the same slogan. As they neared the line of soldiers, an officer shouted for them to stop; they paid it no attention. One officer then ordered his men to fire. The soldiers first fired into the air, but the officer, shouting angrily and forcing one soldier's rifle barrel down, said, “I told you — shoot into them.” I heard my brother cry out, “Shoot whom? Are you mad?” The officer either did not hear the protest or ignored it entirely, and repeated his order. The shooting began, and the young man carrying the Shah's photograph fell. Another was wounded, blood running from his body as he fled down the street to the east of the Ministry, while the rest of the group scattered around the building instead.

Yes — the blood had begun to run around the Peacock Throne. The sight grieved my brother and me deeply, and the officer's conduct astonished us both, for we sensed in it a disobedience and disloyalty within the army itself that could only lead toward what I had always dreaded!

By now it was past two o'clock. My brother and the others present insisted I leave at once. Having repeated my instructions to the police guard to watch the Ministry closely, we all left the building. I had to change my route several times, forced back by shouting crowds armed with sticks and stones, and by pro-Shah Air Force personnel in lorries, chanting “Javid Shah,” blocking the streets. I finally reached the Pahlavi–Naderi crossroads, where I saw the street running west barred by soldiers and tanks guarding the approach to Mossadegh's house, while the street to the east was packed with advancing crowds armed with sticks and stones, carrying enormous photographs of the Shah.

I was nearing Shemiran, where I lived, when I heard the sound of cannon fire echoing from the city — the sign that the opposing factions within the army had finally clashed outright.

I kept myself informed by telephone throughout. The shooting and bloodshed finally stopped at about 8.30 PM, with victory going to the Shah's supporters and General Zahedi. The country's integrity, and the Crown itself, had escaped its most dangerous hour — at the cost of roughly three hundred lives. Which had proved the stronger force in the end — the power of the dollar, or the spiritual power of Borujerdi? Iran had learned, once again, that the power of money is not always as strong as the power of faith.

The next day, 20th August, I left for the office earlier than usual. Along the way, cars could be seen driving with their headlights on, or with photographs of the Shah fixed to their windscreens. I was stopped two or three times by men carrying large sticks, who told me, “Lights on, sir” — I switched mine on and drove on.

When I reached my office the telephone rang — the Ministry switchboard, saying urgently that someone from the Russian Embassy had called several times asking for me, and was on the line again.

The caller, without introducing himself, confirmed he was indeed speaking to Meftah, and said hurriedly, “I only wanted to inform you that the Ambassador attempted suicide last night, and is now under the care of doctors at the Russian Hospital. His condition is not promising.” He then hung up.

The news astonished me. To confirm the call had truly come from the Russian Embassy, I asked the Chief of Protocol to make inquiries, on the pretext that I had heard the Russian Ambassador was unwell. He telephoned back to confirm it — the Ambassador, he was told, was suffering from a severe bout of influenza and could not receive visitors. An hour later, I asked the head of our Second Department (Eastern Europe), who spoke Russian, to repeat the inquiry; this time the answer was that the Ambassador's influenza was very serious, and doctors had ordered him moved to Zargandeh, his summer residence.

I later learned that Anatoly Lavrentiev, seeing the Shah's supporters triumph the day before as the collapse of his own carefully laid plan, had indeed attempted to take his own life. The Tudeh Party's own view, I understood, was that they had been caught unprepared — and that had the struggle only continued into the following morning, the initiative would have been theirs.

In short, this is what I witnessed, and how I tried to contribute to the safeguarding of my country's liberty and independence, during the ten months I served under Mossadegh's government.

I must add that, worrying and unpleasant as those ten months were, coming to understand the psychology and habits of mind of the National Front's members was, in its own way, deeply interesting.

Within the National Front, apart from two or three individuals whose only real quality was ambition — which led them to work against one another, to their own detriment and the movement's alike — the rest were honest, well-educated people who would have done better to remain in university life, where they truly belonged and where they might well have flourished. They had no real grounding in the country's national or international position, and so could never draw up the plan for social reform the country needed — a failure that ruined them in turn, and brought the country to financial ruin along with them.

One curious thing worth recording: the National Front's first formal programme or charter was not published until 1962.

Photographs for this chapter



Pulling down Reza Shah's statue



People rising up against the Mossadegh regime, in one of the streets of Tehran

PART II
Zahedi and I

The Tudeh Party was defeated. Lavrentiev, for all his success in instigating communist revolutions elsewhere, had been driven — by the sheer force of the public uprising's victory — to attempt suicide.

At about 10 AM, while I was at work in my office, the telephone rang. It was General Zahedi, telling me he had set up his office at the Officers' Club and wished to see me. I went at once, and on arrival was shown in to him.

Passing through the middle room, I saw Nikpour, along with another man, waiting to see Zahedi. Once inside, after exchanging greetings, I asked what Nikpour was doing there. “Who?” Zahedi asked. “I saw Nikpour and another man waiting outside,” I said. He paid no attention to my objection.

He asked me to sit at the desk facing him and said we had to write an urgent, confidential letter — he told me what he wanted written, and that I should write it myself, there at the Club. A room, a typewriter, and everything else I needed were quickly put at my disposal, and I set to work in one of the well-furnished rooms on the north side of the building. I asked for a soldier to guard the door so no one could disturb me, and, given the heat, took off my jacket and rolled up my sleeves before starting to type.

I was deep in drafting the letter when I heard someone outside the door asking the soldier to be let in, and pushing at the door itself. Eventually it opened halfway, and a man speaking French said, “I am an Egyptian reporter, and I would very much like a few minutes of your time.” “You can see I am very busy and cannot see you,” I replied — but he pressed the point. Knowing reporters as I did, I judged it might take less time to grant the interview than to get rid of him, so I told the soldier to let him in and lock the door behind him. The reporter and his photographer entered; I left the typewriter and took a seat at the large table in the middle of the room.

The photographer wasted no time taking a few photographs of me, while the reporter introduced himself as being from Akhbar el-Yom. He began his questions. My mind remained fixed on the letter I had left half-finished, but I forced myself to answer him properly all the same. Sensing my unease, he apologised and said he had only a few questions, which he would ask all together, so I could answer them collectively. “Go on, then,” I said. As best I recall, his questions ran roughly: What did Iran think, and what did she expect? Was it true Iran intended to join the Western bloc? Was she prepared to sacrifice her liberties for the sake of money? Would a policy of reason and wisdom now replace the old one?

I told him, “No one can truly picture the state the country is in at present. To weather such extraordinary difficulties, we need a cool head, wisdom, and reason — not hot, nervous emotion.” He said he thought security, above all, was what was needed now.

I reminded him he had said he would number his questions and let me answer them all at once, as my time was limited. He apologised, and I continued: “Our most pressing problem is not security — the people were thoroughly tired of the last regime. Business had come to a standstill, and shopkeepers lost their trade. Now, simply to carry on their own business, the people themselves will contribute to the country's security; stay in Tehran and you will see for yourself how quickly calm returns. People understand perfectly well that without tranquillity, the economy cannot recover, and it is the economy that concerns them most today. We are certainly counting on friendly nations to assist us, since they understand that stability in Iran's economic and political condition contributes greatly to the stability of the Middle East as a whole.” I added that we had a thousand other problems demanding our time, and none to spare for idle speculation.

He asked whether we intended to renew diplomatic relations with Britain. “Certainly,” I said. “Sooner or later we shall re-establish relations. We hold nothing against Britain, and least of all against her people.” He cut in: “Is your policy shifting from left to right?”

“I'm not sure I follow what you mean by 'your policy,'” I said. “Forgive me — I mean the Iranian government's policy,” he clarified. “Still, I don't see what you mean,” I said. “I served in the last government, and I serve in this one, and I have felt nothing of left or right in either.” To head off further questions along that line, I told him this government was not there to reverse the movement begun two years earlier, but to carry it forward — we simply hoped the world would recognise that Iran had changed, that the Iran of today was not the old Persia, and that her people were now fully aware

of their own rights. If Britain's public took that to heart, I said, every remaining difficulty between us could easily be resolved.

I rose to leave. He asked leave to put one last question, promising to go afterward. He said he gathered from our conversation that Iran had no intention of joining any bloc. “There has been no talk of joining any bloc at all,” I said. “All I can tell you is that we will submit to nothing that is not in our national interest.” I walked him to the door and wished him bon voyage.

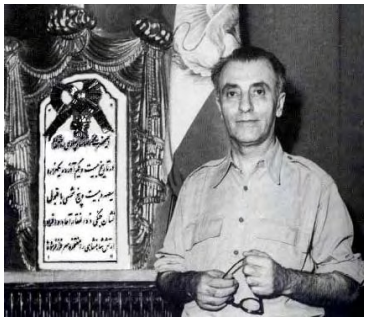
It was nearly noon by the time I finished the letter and brought it to General Zahedi. I explained the reason for the delay, and he asked what had passed between the reporter and me — I told him everything in detail. He was pleased, and endorsed my answers to the reporter.

Zahedi was alone when I brought him the letter, and asked me to stay for lunch so we could discuss a few matters. We began with the formation of the Cabinet. He asked me to take charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I told him I had never shied away from work, and he should have no doubt of my willingness to serve with him — but that, in my honest opinion, someone like Nasrollah Entezam ought to head the Foreign Ministry given the present situation. Zahedi said Entezam was not yet back in Tehran, and that I had better carry on in the role until he returned.

For my own part, I had been quietly hoping, with Panahi's help, to secure a post abroad — the ten months under Mossadegh's government had been enough to shatter my nerves, having seen at close quarters just how gravely the country's existence had been threatened. I was, besides, far from confident the oil question would end well; if the Americans took the industry over, there was no guarantee we would fare any better, particularly with Henderson fully aware of our worsening finances and America's own growing appetite for influence in the Middle East. No moment could have suited such ambitions better. But Panahi pressed me to stay, and I understood well enough why.

A number of people were eager to find a place in Zahedi's Cabinet whom I would rather have overlooked entirely. There was no question that Zahedi's own capacity for friendship and chivalry was without equal, and Panahi and I both felt such people were better rewarded with money or an appointment outside the Cabinet — one we did not consider them worthy of. But Zahedi reasoned that these were men who had spent months running up and down the hill at Ghaitarieh with him in hiding, and so he could not bring himself to refuse them outright.

Photographs for this chapter



Zahedi at the Tehran Officers' Club



Zahedi with The Shah and A. H. Meftah



General Zahedi's first Cabinet — A. H. Meftah is first on the second row

My First Critic in Zahedi's Cabinet

The Shah returned to Tehran after three days away from the country, and the reception the people gave him could only be read as their own answer to Dr. Mossadegh's referendum. Since that historic event was covered in full detail in the Iranian press at the time, I will not repeat it here.

Zahedi wished to be entirely his own master in forming the Cabinet, so that he could work only with people he trusted. But pressure — or influence — from the Shah forced him, against his own wishes, to include one or two rather undesirable figures.

The Cabinet was, in any case, presented to the Shah on 23rd August 1953 at Saad Abad Palace, as follows: Prime Minister, General F. Zahedi; Minister of Finance, Dr. A. Amini; Minister of Justice, Jamal Akhavi; Minister of Roads, Engineer Meykadeh; Minister of War, General Vossough; Minister of Agriculture, Engineer Ahmad Hossein Adl; Minister of Health, Dr. Jahanshah Saleh; Minister of State, A. G. Panahi; Minister of State, Dr. Ali Asghar Hekmat; Minister of the Interior, Brigadier Jahanbani; Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone, Brigadier Farzanegan; and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. H. Meftah.

Once the introductions were over, the Shah addressed the Cabinet: “You must bear in mind that the people shed their blood to be rid of Mossadegh and bring this government to power. Do not conduct yourselves in a way that leads them to feel that blood was shed for nothing.”

Wise advice, certainly — but unfortunately, as I have already suggested, two of the Ministers were not inclined to grasp the gravity of the moment and paid the Shah's words little respect. They seemed, perhaps, to see in their new posts only a chance to make up for losses suffered in years past.

I did not think it appropriate to hold Cabinet meetings at the Officers' Club, and told Zahedi so, urging him to move his office — and the Cabinet's meetings — either to the upper floor of the Foreign Ministry or to the White Palace. He chose the Foreign Ministry, and the large commission room became the Cabinet's meeting place from then on.

Every day at six in the evening the Cabinet met, usually sitting until midnight. Zahedi set up his own office in one of the rooms of the Minister's private apartments and worked from there.

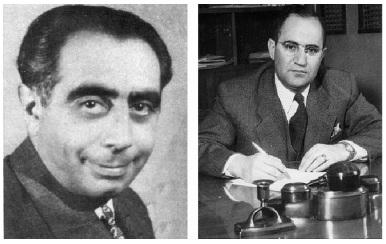
It was on the second or third day after the Cabinet's presentation to the Shah that I was driving home with my late brother, G. H. Meftah — nearly two o'clock, the news hour — and he switched on the car radio. The very first item of home news was the appointment of a certain man as Acting Governor-General of Isfahan — news that shocked us both, my brother especially, since he knew the man rather better than I did. He was, beyond being a well-known corrupt official, someone who had already served in Isfahan once before, and had been thoroughly disliked there. The news angered me and brought back the Shah's own words at the Cabinet's introduction. I resolved to raise the appointment at the next Cabinet meeting.

It was nearing six that evening when my office attendant told me the Ministers had already gathered in the commission hall. I joined them, and a few minutes later Zahedi arrived, wearing a khaki military shirt. He took his seat in the middle of the table, facing north, drew his small revolver, and set it down in front of him. The Ministers took their places around the table; I sat facing south, next to Engineer Meykadeh.

Just as Zahedi was about to open the meeting formally, I asked leave to speak first, which he granted. I related what I had heard on the radio, and said I found it astonishing that, after what His Majesty had said at the Cabinet's introduction, the very first appointment made by the Ministry of the Interior should be a man of such unpleasant reputation, given charge of a province as important as Isfahan. Before I had even finished, the Acting Minister of the Interior, along with Dovlatabadi — nobody quite knew why he was always present at these meetings, though he served as the meeting's secretary — raised their voices against me, insisting the man was clever and capable. I said I had no doubt he was clever and capable — for himself — but my objection stood: he was corrupt, and quite unsuited to such a post, and I pressed for the appointment to be reconsidered. Dr. Amini and Dr. Jahanshah Saleh both spoke in support of my view, and the meeting descended into a real wrangle. Seeing the dispute taking hold, Zahedi raised his hands and said, “Gentlemen, there is no need to quarrel over a man other members do not approve of. Better that someone else be chosen.”

With Zahedi's ruling, the argument died down and the meeting formally began. That was my first real criticism voiced in Cabinet, and it earned me, in the eyes of most members — barring two or three — considerable standing. Meykadeh took to calling me “the Lion of the meetings.” Yes, I was given that name, quite unaware that the Acting Minister of the Interior was already, quietly, assembling a file of accusations against me — a dirty practice which, unfortunately, has a long history in my country!

Photographs for this chapter



Dr. Ali Amini and Dr. Jahanshah Saleh

Renewing Diplomatic Relations with England

Zahedi set up his office on the third floor of the Foreign Ministry, and the Cabinet met there as well. One morning, in those first days, he telephoned to ask about the state of relations between Iran and Britain. I gave him a brief account of where matters stood, and added that, in principle, I had always been against the diplomatic rupture — had I reached Tehran even a week earlier, I would certainly have tried to stop it — and that, in my view, relations ought now to be restored. Zahedi smiled and said, “I thought you had no sympathy for the British. How is it you opposed the rupture, and now believe we should renew relations?”

I replied, “As we say in the civil service, every case has its own file — and we are dealing with two quite different ones here. The oil question, and the question of Iran's relationship with Britain — two very different things! The oil question is purely economic; as I told Fatemi at the time, no country severs diplomatic relations over an economic dispute. What's more, the Swiss Legation currently looking after British interests here is headed by a rather ineffective man, so we can hardly expect much from that quarter. Nor am I entirely convinced how much Britain trusts or values the American mediation — reading between the lines of the British press, one gets the sense England now sees America as something of an obstacle. For all these reasons, and above all for the sake of our own desperate finances, I believe we should renew relations. I hope Britain has by now been chastened enough to see the need for a change of course.”

As for my own lack of sympathy for Britain, I admit it freely — they have always preferred working with 'yes men,' and I have always made it clear, directly or otherwise, that while I would gladly be their friend, I would not simply carry their orders as one. It is our duty to be friendly with everyone, on the condition that friendship is returned in kind. Beyond that, the present position of Iran and of England in the Near East struck me as rather like two unfriendly neighbouring farmers, both threatened by the same flood, forced nonetheless to pick up their shovels and timber and work together to divert it.

Zahedi consulted others outside the Foreign Ministry, who fortunately endorsed my view, and it was on that basis that Britain's wish to restore diplomatic relations was accepted. The British Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Denis Wright, arrived in Tehran on 19th December 1953, presenting himself at the Foreign Ministry four days later. That this gentleman had never previously served in the East, and so belonged to none of the old Levant Service circles, was widely taken as a promising sign of a genuine shift in British policy toward Iran.

We were still in the earliest days of Zahedi's government, with the country in a desperate financial state — the only funds keeping it running at all were the five million dollars paid monthly by America, which barely covered the civil service payroll.

Dr. Amini was instructed to present the Cabinet with a report on the country's finances — not a difficult report to prepare, given there was simply no money in sight to report on. It did not take him long. At one Cabinet meeting, as he reached the point in his report where even civil servants' pension reserves and ordinary depositors' savings at Bank Melli had all been drawn down, Zahedi suddenly raised his voice: “Gentlemen, please, keep this among yourselves — say nothing to anyone. If the true state of the Bank were known, it would have to close its doors.”

Such was the harsh reality of the country's bankruptcy. And while American financial assistance weakened Iran's standing relative to America herself, it also gave the Eastern European press ample ammunition to attack the regime bitterly, Zahedi's government most of all. Surprisingly, it was the Polish press — from a country thousands of kilometres away, and one that enjoyed reasonably favourable trade relations with Iran — that attacked us more fiercely

than any other country behind the Iron Curtain. The paper Express Wieczorny treated the question of Iran and American aid, and Zahedi in particular, in the most insulting terms, claiming American capitalists meant only to profit from Iran's misfortune, and suggesting that England, watching the crisis anxiously, might soon come into open conflict with America within the Atlantic Pact itself.

This kind of triviality appeared in the Polish papers almost daily, until one day I felt compelled to summon the Polish Chargé d'Affaires to the Ministry and give him a thorough dressing-down over their conduct. I told him, “Our two countries share no border, and so have no frontier or political dispute that might explain why your government allows its papers to insult senior figures in ours. Our trade relations are modest, and weighted in your country's favour — it would be in your own interest to keep relations between us as cordial as possible, if you wish to preserve your market here. Instead, your country's conduct leaves no doubt that Poland has no interest in friendly relations with Iran at all. I therefore see no reason to continue bearing the cost of maintaining our mission in Warsaw. I have instructed our Minister there to meet your Foreign Minister and protest vigorously against the Polish press's conduct — and if he cannot obtain assurances that this abuse will stop, he is to close the Legation and leave Warsaw within a week. I asked to see you simply to inform you of the contents of that telegram. Naturally, I expect you to leave Tehran within the same week.”

The poor Chargé d'Affaires — personally a pleasant, quiet man — grew visibly uneasy, went pale, and said, stammering, “You know my own esteem and sympathy for Iran. You should not attach too much importance to what the papers write.” Before he could finish, I said, “You know as well as I do that your country is a Communist dictatorship, where freedom of the pen and of speech simply does not exist, and the papers print only what they are told to print. You yourself may well wish to preserve good relations between our two countries, but your press makes clear your government does not share that wish. In any case, I only wanted you to know my government's decision, and the instructions already cabled to our representative in Warsaw.” I then rose, signalling the visit was over.

I genuinely felt for him, given the state in which he left my office. Early the next morning he telephoned asking to see me at once; I had him come at noon. He arrived smiling and told me he had spent the entire previous night in direct telegraphic contact with his Ministry, explaining the merits of my protest. They had replied that our own Minister in Warsaw had already been to see them and conveyed our government's decision, and he was glad to say they had given firm assurances that the Polish press would print nothing further against Iran, expressing their regret at having angered the Iranian government. He had also been instructed to repeat those same assurances to me directly, along with his government's regret.

I told him I appreciated his swift action, and that new instructions would be sent to our Legation once we had their full report.

Following this démarche, the Polish papers dropped their anti-Iran campaign entirely. The other countries behind the Iron Curtain took note as well — as was common practice at the time, the representatives of the Eastern European countries stationed in any non-Communist country kept one another informed of local events, and word of Iran's action against the Polish press reached them all, prompting a certain caution on their part. On two occasions before the Polish affair, I had already had to be quite firm with two other Communist embassies distributing Persian-language propaganda that had clearly been printed abroad — I had to ask Customs officials to open the suspect diplomatic mail of those missions.

The Romanian Minister and his staff were fervent Communists, similarly engaged in distributing propaganda pamphlets. Just before the uprising of 19th August 1953, police reports noted that staff at the Romanian Legation had been heard expressing hope that the building housing their Legation — which they merely rented — would soon belong to them outright.

My Lecture in Tehran's Staff College

Zahedi brought great changes to every branch of Iranian administration, particularly within the Army. General Batmanghelich took over as Chief of the General Staff, and General Hejazi became Commanding Officer of the Staff College.

My friendship with Hejazi went back nearly thirty years, to when he was a student in Paris and I was an Attaché at our Legation in London. We met during vacations and came to know one another's way of thinking and patriotic feeling. Once both back in Iran, we would meet at receptions or private gatherings, and our friendship deepened over the years.

After his appointment as Commanding Officer of the Staff College, I ran into him by chance one day at the Darband Hotel, and we fell into discussing political matters. He asked whether I would be willing to speak to the Staff College officers about my diplomatic experience. I said I would be glad to, and we agreed to put together a series of lectures on Iran's international relations for the College.

My plan was to open with a short account of how my own career, and the travelling it involved, had shaped my understanding of my country, and then to go on and treat our relations with each of our neighbours in turn.

I prepared the text of my first lecture and sent it to General Hejazi for approval. Two weeks later he told me it had been approved by the Shah himself, and that the afternoon of 3rd Bahman 1332 — 23rd January 1954 — had been fixed for the lecture, and that he expected me there on that date. The lecture was titled “The Iranians Do Not Know Who They Are.” The Minister of War, the Chief of the General Staff, more than two hundred senior officers and Staff College students, and a number of Foreign Ministry department heads were all present.

The lecture ran to about an hour. I had not expected it to stir such strong feeling in the audience — feeling that was deeply encouraging, and that proved to me real Iranian blood still ran in these officers' veins. Their response taught me something I have believed ever since: that if the injustices and difficulties imposed on the country are properly explained to the public, and to the Armed Forces in particular, through lectures or publications, they will stand ready to volunteer in defence of the country's integrity, independence, and its ancient traditional symbols — and no amount of hostile propaganda will succeed in misleading them. I am certain that bringing the record of past foreign injustice and misconduct into the open only strengthens patriotic feeling.

News of the lecture reached the Shah at once through the Chief of the General Staff. The next day, General Batmanghelich came to my office and said, “I am instructed by His Imperial Majesty to convey his satisfaction with your lecture, and his order that you continue with the series.”

The Shah's message encouraged me more than I can say, and I resolved to prepare a lecture every fortnight for the Staff College students.

General Hedayat, the Minister of War, who had also attended, went on afterward to that day's Cabinet meeting, where he described to the other Ministers how deeply the lecture had moved its audience.

The commanding officer of the Military Academy, also present, asked me to repeat it for his own cadets, and the Director of Tehran Radio wanted to broadcast it. I declined both, on the grounds that lectures given at the Staff College were confidential and should not be made public. As it happened, though, the lecture was later printed as a pamphlet and distributed to officers and to our representatives abroad, with no note of its confidentiality attached — with the result that foreign missions came to know of it as well.

Zahedi asked whether I would join the Public Guidance Committee; I declined, given how fully my work at the Ministry already occupied me.

Photographs for this chapter



General Nader Batmanghelich and General Hejazi

Baluchestan Frontier Dispute

We had an old dispute with England over the Baluchistan boundary going back to 1896. It began when a certain Captain Goldsmith, under the pretext of surveying the telegraph line running through Mokran and the Baluchistan

coast to Bushehr, was in reality sent to sow discord among the region's tribal chiefs, and between the Khan of Kalat and Iran in particular. His mischief-making led to a note being presented to the Iranian government, accompanied by a map delineating the Khan's state — the so-called "Kalat Border." This note and map were presented while Goldsmith, under the guise of protecting the Khan's interests, had advanced as far as the small town of Panjgur, sending an ultimatum that if the note and map were not accepted, he would advance further still.

The reply to that ultimatum was worded in a way that left room for future claims: "While recognising our rights over the Baluchistan region, to please the British government, we accept the note and its accompanying map." Yet the Iranian government refrained from joining any demarcation commission for over sixty years afterward.

It would have served both England and Iran better had Britain helped Iran out of the miseries brought on her by the Treaty of Turkamanchai, rather than adding to them — particularly after the Congress of Vienna (1812–1822), by which time England must surely have understood Russia's eventual designs on the Middle East and Asia. A strong Iran, working with Great Britain, could well have pushed Russia out of Central Asia. Between 1880 and 1907, Russia — beset by revolutionary unrest and a hundred other problems left over from the Napoleonic wars — was in no position to face a major conflict, any more than she could face Japan in 1905.

Regrettably, the spirit of the Vienna Congress left the major powers of the day so blinded by a love of conquest that no ethical behaviour or logic could be expected of them. The result of that disaster is plain to see across Asia and Africa today.

I had hoped that Pakistan, given her own recent and rather artificial creation, would weigh the region's history carefully and act in a way that won Iran's sympathy — that, mindful of Britain's forced occupation and penetration of Iran over the preceding 150 years, she might propose a revision of Goldsmith's note on grounds of international moral principle and justice.

What followed proved my hopes for Pakistan badly mistaken. Soon after declaring independence — even before formally seeking Iran's recognition — Pakistan took advantage of Iran's wartime weakness to send a man named Sheikh Faiz into Iranian Baluchistan, exploiting the famine then raging there by promising food and other aid, hoping to win the people's sympathy toward joining Pakistan.

At the time, Qavam-al-Saltaneh, a strong figure, held the premiership, but the Foreign Minister remained, regrettably, in the grip of the old school of political-science officials — ardent believers in preserving the status quo, who conducted themselves in an almost servile manner. When an order arrived from the Foreign Ministry, I — known within the Ministry as familiar with Afghan and Baluchi affairs — was asked to join the frontier commission. Its chairman was Pirnazar, then Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, an ineffectual, weak character. Besides myself, the commission comprised three other Ministry directors.

One or two meetings passed under Pirnazar's chairmanship, during which my arguments, grounded in international practice, blocked the recognition of Pakistan that the department concerned was pressing for, as a means of halting Sheikh Faiz's activities in Baluchistan. I argued that the government's anxiety was misplaced and beside the point, and proposed that representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the General Staff attend the commission's next meeting. Before that meeting took place, however, a change occurred at the Foreign Ministry: Pirnazar was replaced by Dr. Aligholi Ardalan.

In the meantime, a report reached us from our Consul-General in Quetta that Ahmad Yar Khan, the Khan of Kalat, had been asked to state his own inclination, and was considering telling the authorities that he preferred to rejoin Iran. At the next commission meeting, now chaired by Ardalan, I proposed that a positive reply be sent to the Khan. Dr. Ardalan opposed this strongly, arguing it ran contrary to the status quo and so deserved no attention. I explained the duress under which the present status quo had been forced upon Iran, and argued we had no obligation to defend it — our policy should instead rest on the ante-status-quo position, which favoured us. Unfortunately, such complexes ran so deep within our Foreign Ministry that no genuinely patriotic policy could gain a foothold.

It was eventually agreed that our Consul-General in Quetta and General Hejazi, then Commanding Officer of the South-Eastern Command, should come to Tehran and report to the commission in person. About a week later, the commission met — General Hejazi, Ahmad Ghadimi (our Consul-General in Quetta), and two General Staff officers among them. Before the meeting, the only person Ghadimi had spoken with was Dr. Ardalan, and he had plainly

absorbed Ardalan's pro-status-quo view — for when I questioned him about his own earlier report of his meeting with the Khan of Kalat, he mumbled that yes, he had sent such a report, but the situation had since changed.

That answer annoyed me, and I felt obliged to disclose, in the meeting itself, my own confidential view on the necessity of rectifying our south-eastern frontier line — a view I still consider a matter of national sensitivity, and one I prefer not to set down in detail even now. I then turned to General Hejazi and told him that, on returning to Baluchistan, he should inform Sheikh Faiz that unless he left the province within twenty-four hours, his safety could not be guaranteed, given the strength of local feeling against him.

My intervention caused a real row, which ended in the commission's dissolution. Once Dr. Ardalan had left the room, the two Staff Officers came to congratulate me, saying frankly, “As Staff Officers, we had never grasped the strategic importance of such a frontier change. We sincerely congratulate you on your patriotic feeling and your knowledge of the ground.” General Hejazi asked whether I had been entirely serious about Sheikh Faiz. I told him I was completely serious, and that he could be assured nothing would come of it, along with one or two other useful tips. He returned to his command, and shortly afterward Sheikh Faiz fled Baluchistan.

My readers will no doubt be surprised to learn that, about two months later, Hejazi was relieved of his post.

The frontier dispute itself remained unresolved for some five years, until I became Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry. To prepare public opinion, I began a series of articles under a pen-name in the weekly magazine Ettela'at-e Haftegi, setting out the history of the Baluchistan boundary.

On 4th February 1954, Nassim Hossein, the Pakistani Chargé d'Affaires, asked to see me; we met the next morning at ten. He asked whether I had seen the Ettela'at-e Haftegi articles. I told him I had read the summary prepared by our own Information Department, and that, as I understood it, the writer was giving a concise history of the Baluchistan boundary. “If you find anything in those articles that needs correcting,” I told him, “write to the magazine and point out the mistake. If they decline to publish your reply, let me know, and I shall see that it is published — though I have little doubt they will publish it themselves, since they, like me, wish only to know the truth.” Nassim Hossein said nothing further, and left after discussing a few other matters.

About seven years later, when Dr. Ardalan himself was Minister of Foreign Affairs, the frontier dispute was finally settled — on the basis of Goldsmith's original note.

This kind of inferiority complex is one of our national afflictions and will likely need a few more generations to shake off entirely. A hundred years under the capitulations left our ruling class almost entirely stripped of patriotic national character. However hard our writers and poets have tried to revive our national pride, they have not yet fully succeeded. Any Iranian who showed real feeling for his country was either removed from his post, or, in cases such as Sani-ed-Dowleh Hedayat, assassinated outright. It is a matter for regret that even now, some forty years after Reza Shah abolished the capitulations in 1928, the country remains — directly or indirectly — in the grip of that same generation, or their descendants, who simply dropped their old mask after Reza Shah's forced abdication and carried on much as before.

That is why my conversation with Denis Wright was quietly shelved and forgotten. My views on the Baluchistan frontier dispute, and my plan to reform and reorganise the Ministry — not least by creating a proper research department — were all, in the end, filed away and left to gather dust.

Photographs for this chapter



Qavam-al-Saltaneh



Dr. Aligholi Ardalan

Oil Consortium

Soheili left Tehran for London on 11th March 1954. I heard nothing from him afterward to suggest he had ever taken up the subject of my conversation with Denis Wright there.

On 31st March I was invited to a luncheon at the British Embassy. Afterward, Denis Wright and I sat together on a sofa, discussing the Oil Consortium then being established. Mr. Ala, overhearing us, asked, “May I sit between you two and listen? I am rather interested in this myself.” He took the seat between us. Wright was explaining the difficulties involved in controlling production, given that the old company, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, along with the other Consortium members, wished to have a hand in it. I told him that once the Consortium's board included both Iranians and foreigners, along with a large number of foreign experts and engineers, there should be no real grounds for anxiety, or any need for the Consortium members to demand additional controls over production. Wright said, “Just as you must respect public opinion here, we too are obliged to respect public opinion in Britain.” I said, “No — the British public has no right to interfere in the affairs of a private company taking part in a foreign consortium.”

Throughout both Mossadegh's period and Zahedi's, the Foreign Ministry had no real say in oil nationalisation, the matter being handled entirely from the Prime Minister's Office. But I, personally, given all I had witnessed of the dishonesty and irregularity of foreign concessionaires in Iran — in oil, banking, telegraphs, and more — was opposed to foreign concessions of any kind.

In a book I published in 1947 on social reform in Iran, I wrote frankly: “In my opinion, calling in foreign concessionaires hinders the country's economic development, and at times even threatens our independence and territorial integrity. For a weak country such as Iran to grant economic concessions to foreigners is a foolish and highly dangerous course. The country's constitutional law should therefore prohibit foreign concessions in Iran altogether.”

It is now well established, besides, that the country's above- and below-ground wealth was not only the backbone of its economy but the very support of its foreign and domestic policy alike. Why, then, should we not profit from our own resources ourselves?

When the National Front first launched the oil nationalisation movement in Parliament, and I saw that the move had the Shah's own backing as Head of State, I did not hesitate to express my feelings in the weekly bulletin I published, first in Istanbul and later in Hamburg, in the two cities where I served as Consul-General. I do not regret a word of what I wrote then. I regret only that the National Front's mistakes pushed the country to the very brink of bankruptcy — mistakes that eventually led to the unhappy arrangement we were forced into with the Consortium. I still remember asking Dr. Amini, point-blank, whether we were selling our oil outright or merely granting a concession. I received no answer, though I had expected none — I simply wanted him to understand that keeping the oil question secret from me, or from the Foreign Ministry, did not mean our eyes and ears were closed.

Even later, while serving as Ambassador in The Hague, I received disturbing information that prompted me to take up the matter again, in a letter setting out my concerns to Senator Lessany. In reply, he sent me a copy of a speech he had given in Parliament, in which he said that in the entire government there was not one person who showed the slightest genuine sympathy for the country's interest.

I could only wish that those entrusted with Iran's oil affairs had possessed even one percent of the sympathy for Iran that Elwell Sutton showed in his book Persian Oil.

I and the Russian Cultural Institute

Our differences with the U.S.S.R. remained unresolved, and the Commission established just before Mossadegh's fall to work through them was suspended. But the wounded Lavrentiev was far from idle. Tudeh activity simply went underground. The secret police repeatedly reported, verbally, that Tudeh Party members were being driven around town in diplomatic car number 102 and meeting at the Russian Cultural Institute, which had become a centre of their activity. I asked the police to put their report in writing; they did, confirming that car 102 belonged to the Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy, who oversaw the Embassy's cultural affairs, and that Karim Keshavarz — a man the police were seeking — had been seen travelling in it with him.

I never cared to publicise or make a show of my own actions, and tried always to keep them out of the public eye. There was no doubt we had every right to close the Cultural Institute at once and expel the diplomat involved — precisely the measure the Soviets would have taken had one of our own diplomats in Moscow been caught in a comparable position.

But knowing the government's own complexes, I judged that if I informed them of my intentions beforehand, nothing would ever come of the plan. I therefore split it into two parts: the first I would carry out on my own authority, issuing the necessary instructions and presenting the government with an accomplished fact; the second I would handle by informing the Minister of what I had done, after the fact.

The police reported the arrest at once, and to complete the second part of my plan, I reported the matter to Entezam, telling him I intended to summon the Embassy Counsellor immediately. He approved. I called in Mr. Barzanov, the Counsellor, and explained why the Iranian government — Zahedi's government especially — wished for permanent, good-neighbourly relations with Soviet Russia, and that we naturally expected such goodwill to be reciprocated. Regrettably, we had come to observe that the Russian Cultural Institute, with the Embassy's assistance, was behaving in a manner directly contrary to that policy of goodwill, and damaging to our existing good relations. I then explained how Karim Keshavarz had been found in an Embassy car, and conveyed the government's formal protest.

Barzanov, after complaining about the tone of the Tehran press toward the U.S.S.R., said that car 102 belonged to Feodorov, the Second Secretary in charge of the Embassy's cultural affairs, who had simply been giving a lift to the Secretary of the Cultural Institute, without knowing the man was being sought by the police. I told him I had noted his explanation regarding Feodorov, but that Feodorov should nonetheless leave Iran within a week, as his conduct amounted to interference in our internal affairs, and it was simply not acceptable for the Ministry to believe the Embassy had been unaware that Keshavarz was being sought by the police.

After Barzanov had left my office, Fahimi, the director of our Second Department (responsible for Eastern Europe), who had been present throughout, said, “Mr. Meftah, they were quite unused to a protest like this from us — it is, again, that old complex from the College of Political Science's capitulation-era generation.” I told him, “You are right, Mr. Fahimi — but you must understand that I am not like those who have sat behind this desk before me. If one of our own staff in Moscow had behaved as Feodorov did, what do you suppose the Russians would have done to him?” In any case, Feodorov left Iran shortly afterward.

Baghdad Pact

I passed each day of 1954 anxiously, expecting some new worry with the next. It was during the second half of October 1953 that news reached me of activity underway in Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan toward a collective defence plan. Hearing this, I recalled an earlier conversation with the Iraqi Ambassador, Baha-ed-Din Noory, who had once asked me, “What would be your opinion if my government proposed a collective defence treaty between Iraq, Iran, and Turkey?”

Thinking of the Saad Abad Pact, I said, “How would the members be held to honour their signatures?”

“There would, of course, be an article to guarantee that,” he said.

I told him, “Mr. Ambassador, I cannot speak for my government's opinion — only my own. As an army officer, you understand my country's strategic position better than most. Iran sits on the front line, with over two thousand kilometres of unprotected frontier with Russia, which would let Russia advance deep into our heartland before our so-called allies could do anything but face an accomplished fact. What, then, would be the consequence?”

“Oh, do not be so pessimistic,” he said.

I replied that this was not a matter of pessimism or optimism — only that our confidence had already once been betrayed.

I had that conversation still in mind when, a few days before the news broke, the Danish Minister, just back from a tour of Pakistan and Iraq, told me of a defence pact being arranged between Turkey and Pakistan. This news left me in a state of continual anxiety, since it was far from clear who stood behind the move — England, America, or both. I thought we should establish some proper means of gathering intelligence, so as to stay alert to events in the world, and around us especially. I therefore submitted a report to Entezam, arguing that if such a pact were concluded between our neighbours, the resulting military and political encirclement would compound our existing economic difficulties and weaken our position in the oil dispute further still. I proposed three points: first, a commission of experienced Staff Officers and Foreign Ministry officials to study world and Middle Eastern conditions and propose a defensive plan; second, the appointment of a qualified, genuinely patriotic diplomat, free of any foreign complex, to gather intelligence on international political and military affairs; and third, the renewal of diplomatic relations with England without waiting for the oil question to be settled first. I asked Entezam to pass these suggestions on to the Prime Minister, warning that delay would only harm the country.

I knew the third point would be hard for Zahedi, who had no sympathy for the British, to accept. A number of my friends, who had read my views on the British government in my book Armane Iran, were surprised I should suggest such a thing at all. But the difficulty lies precisely there: such men could not accept that, at the time of a flood, two unfriendly farmers might still join hands for their mutual interest. Nor did I ever believe it right to join any pact unconditionally, or to spend sixty million dollars a year from the pockets of a poor people on a pact whose future was, at best, doubtful.

From time to time, a testing balloon was floated to gauge Iranian public opinion, until, in mid-January 1954, Jalal Bayar, President of the Turkish Republic, left for New York via England. At his press conference in Washington, he spoke in favour of strengthening and completing the Baghdad Pact — asked by reporters what would happen if Iran declined to join, leaving a ring missing from the chain, he replied, “We have another pact with Iran, the Saad Abad Pact, which will substitute for the missing ring.”

The next day, a few reporters came to my office and asked my opinion of Bayar's remarks about the Saad Abad Pact. I answered them plainly, without ambiguity: “The Saad Abad Pact is a dead letter for us, and therefore does not exist.”

They then asked my view on Iran joining any bloc. I said, “It is true that during the last two wars we declared our neutrality, and that neutrality was not respected — our country was invaded regardless. But we have also seen countries with a system of positive neutrality manage to preserve it, and be respected by the belligerents, precisely because they did not rely on a bare written declaration and international law alone. Joining a bloc, in any case, is a question requiring very careful study. Nothing should be done in haste.”

I Felt Myself Undesirable in the Ministry

The Tehran papers took my remarks as opposition to joining any bloc at all. My interview, and the way the papers interpreted it, displeased the Baghdad Pact embassies considerably — the Turkish Ambassador especially was annoyed by my comments on the Saad Abad Pact. But when I had an audience with the Shah before leaving for The Hague, His Majesty praised my view on the Saad Abad Pact, though on the matter of joining a bloc he said, “You should not have spoken so frankly.”

As I have said, my view was that we should work toward a condition of positive neutrality for the country, so that if we were ever obliged to enter a bloc, our entry would not be unconditional. I meant, at the very least, that we should first settle our frontier disputes with Iraq and Pakistan. I certainly preferred positive neutrality to any alternative, since under it we could develop our position more strongly, and at far less expense — and, above all, we could restore our old standing and prestige in the Middle East.

My thirty-odd years in the Foreign Ministry taught me that whatever flattering words one hears from foreigners, Europeans especially, are meant only to deceive or mislead us, and should never be taken seriously. I also learned that the British have a particular sympathy for the Arabs, even when the Arabs behave unfriendly toward England — and I was glad, not long ago, to hear that very view confirmed by a British diplomat himself.

We have a saying in Persian: “We have heard of friendship without cause, but never of enmity without cause.” Is there a single Englishman brave enough to tell us plainly the true cause of their antipathy toward Iran?

I was, moreover, certain that our joining the Baghdad Pact would only push Russia to extend her influence further across the Middle East — which she duly did — effectively encircling the Pact itself. I made sure, while in The Hague, to convey this anticipation to my Ministry.

What, in the end, did we actually gain from the Baghdad Pact, militarily or economically? I recall a colleague of mine once asking Dr. Eghbal, then Prime Minister, exactly that question. His answer was: “Militarily, a burden of 120 million dollars a year — and economically, three zeros.”

That is why I was never in favour of joining any bloc. A further reason was that it would leave us strongly handcuffed, with no free hand to build our prestige and popularity across the Middle East.

That is also why, on hearing in The Hague that Entezam had left Tehran for a short visit to Paris and London, I met him in London and repeated my dislike of the Baghdad Pact to him directly. “Meftah,” he told me, “I promise you I shall not sign the Pact.” He kept that promise — but after Jalal Bayar's visit to Tehran, he secured the Iranian government's agreement to join it regardless. Entezam, on the pretext of illness, left Tehran for Paris for medical treatment, and shut himself away at the Hotel St. Georges — so that the honour of actually signing the Pact fell instead to Samii, his Undersecretary.

A second reason behind my policy of positive neutrality was that our delicate geographic and strategic position demanded a free hand to prepare the country, morally and materially, strong enough to defend that neutrality on its own.

The moral and material losses Iran suffered during the last war — and especially what followed it, when Russian forces refused to evacuate the country in violation of the Tehran Declaration of 1943 — leave little doubt that no fundamental change had occurred in Soviet policy toward Iran, a policy of conquest inherited whole from the Tsarist regime. Under Nicholas II, when a division of Iran into spheres of influence between Britain and Russia was discussed, Nicholas himself is said to have held that “there can be no division — the whole of Persia must belong to us.” We should not forget, either, that as early as 1918, the prominent Communist K. M. Troianovsky wrote of Iran's importance to world revolution: “Because of its geopolitical position, and its significance for the liberation of the East, it must be conquered politically first. The precious key to revolutions in the East must be in our hand: at all costs, Persia must be ours. Persia must belong to the Revolution.” Those words came from men who claimed, and still claim, to be fighting against imperialism — while practising Communist imperialism themselves.

No real change, then, can be found between Imperial Russia's policy and that of the Soviet Union — nor is any likely in future. With such a record, why should we hand them any pretext, however unjust, for interference?

The great powers will not change their policy toward Iran so long as Iranians remain physically and morally weak. With that in mind, I argued in Armane Iran that no moral or physical advancement of our people is possible without first eliminating illiteracy — for an educated population soon takes real interest in its national character and responsibility, through learning its own history and understanding the part its ancestors played in the wider story of world civilisation.

It is true that nuclear weapons, and the growing rift between Russia and China, have greatly reduced the danger we once felt from our northern neighbour, and Russia herself must by now recognise that aggression and the building of walls bring nothing but fear and hatred from the rest of the world.

By joining the Pact unconditionally, we handcuffed ourselves, taking on the heavy burden of a defence plan imposed on us largely for the sake of oil and the economic advantage of others. Russia, meanwhile, was only encouraged to extend her influence in the countries beyond Iran, effectively encircling the Pact — an effect soon visible in Iraq's own withdrawal from it.

There is another point worth bearing in mind whenever we are tempted to sign such a pact: the case of Poland. Her independence and integrity were never truly guaranteed by France and England. Is today's Poland the same pre-war Poland whose integrity those two countries once pledged to protect?

Does our own Defence Pact provide Iran with strength enough to defend her frontiers even for three or four months, while our allies decide their position? Or was it arranged, in truth, to defend nothing more than the oilfields of southern Iran, the Persian Gulf, and the wider Middle East? The answer, I think, can be found in the English and American press, which described the Pact's defence line as running along the Zagros mountains in southern Iran. Whether the discovery of oil near Qom — if indeed there is any — has since changed that plan, I cannot say. My other reason for opposing the Pact is best illustrated by an exchange with the Turkish Chargé d'Affaires at a reception, who asked me, “By the way, Mr. Ambassador, why were you not in favour of joining the Pact?” I said, “Did we not already have the Saad Abad Pact with you? Did you honour your signature on that?” Before I could finish, he said, “No — we did not even issue a declaration.”

“Well then,” I said, “with that experience behind us, what assurance is there that the same would not happen again?”

America is a member of NATO, and should any NATO member fall victim to a Russian attack, America is bound automatically to come to its aid — as she demonstrated in the famous Berlin Airlift, coming swiftly to her allies' assistance. Our own position vis-à-vis America is quite different. She was never a military member of CENTO, and it was never clear what her actual response would be were Iran to become the victim of an attack from the north.

These were the reasons behind my lack of sympathy for the Baghdad Pact. And today — after Iraq's withdrawal from it, Pakistan's flirtation with Red China, Turkey's own instability, and, above all, America's refusal to commit herself militarily to CENTO while continuing to aid the Arab countries — one may reasonably doubt the Pact's real defensive value.

Yes — it was for voicing such patriotic convictions that I came to feel myself undesirable within the Ministry.

The one thin hope we could still cling to was that the next war, should it come, would move so fast that it might be over before it ever reached us.

Building Tankers in Holland

From what I have written so far, it is easy to see how my patriotic efforts had a habit of working against me, increasing my own troubles in the process. Even so, I did not wish to leave my desk at the Foreign Ministry before two long-standing matters were settled: the Iran–Pakistan frontier dispute, and the Ministry's own reform. But feeling myself so uncomfortable there, I judged it better to leave and take up the post that had been offered to me some months before. So, with real reluctance, I left my desk at the Foreign Ministry and flew to The Hague on 20th June 1954. I presented my Letters of Credence to Her Majesty Queen Juliana at Soestdijk Palace on the 23rd.

The Iranian Embassy stood at the Villa Wilszang in Wassenaar, near The Hague — the very villa in which I had first met Dr. Mossadegh, some three years before. I was fortunate in my collaborators: Ashtiany, Ahmad Mir Fenderesky (later Ambassador in Algeria, and afterward in Moscow), and the late Peyamiras and Nakhai. I was equally fortunate in the contacts I made within the Dutch Foreign Ministry — Dr. Lunz, Mr. Beyen, and Echosier among them.

Although the Iranian flag flew upside down when I landed at Amsterdam airport — our flag, without its central emblem, can easily be mistaken for the Hungarian one — I am not a superstitious man, and in fact this proved one of the most pleasant and successful periods of my career.

Beyond the usual round of Ministers and dignitaries required by Dutch protocol, I called on the late Professor Gerbrandy, the wartime Prime Minister — a short but very sharp man. On leaving for The Hague, Mr. Mehbod, later Managing Director of the Iranian Shipping Company, had given me a beautiful khatam (fine Persian inlay work) cigarette case to present to him. Once the gift was given, I took the chance to raise the possibility of developing

economic ties between our two countries — mentioning, in particular, my long-standing interest in establishing a merchant marine for Iran, an ambition that had led me, over the years, to set up several commissions at the Foreign Ministry and the War Ministry to study how it might be achieved. I told him I was delighted that His Majesty the Shah had himself taken a keen interest in the idea, and that under his guidance the problem was now moving toward a solution. Gerbrandy told me the matter had already been discussed with Mr. Mehbod several times, without ever going beyond talk. I told him I, personally, was very much interested, and would be glad to place myself at the disposal of anyone involved, should my help prove useful. He thanked me and said they would no doubt need it.

A few days later Professor Gerbrandy flew to Tehran, and on his return reported that everyone there had been helpful — but that the British were displeased with Iran's plan to build one or two tankers of her own, using the 12½ percent of oil products which, under the Consortium agreement, was to be placed at Iran's disposal to transport and sell, and their displeasure was obstructing the whole scheme. This news depressed me greatly, since I knew that if the British disapproved of Iran building tankers, I would never succeed in the effort here in Holland — the Dutch yards would only agree to build them once assured the Consortium would actually supply the Iranian share of oil to fill them.

At the same time, Mehbod was in London seeking Soheili's help in obtaining British Petroleum's agreement. Neither man succeeded, and Mehbod asked Soheili to telephone me for my view.

It was on 16th August, while I was at my office, that Soheili rang and said, “Mr. Meftah, Mr. Mehbod is here, pressing me to obtain British agreement to supply oil for the Iranian tankers from the 12½ percent share. I have done what I can, but I regret to say I have not succeeded — they simply refuse the request.”

On hearing this I grew genuinely agitated and told him, “Mr. Soheili, you know very well I have always been looking for a chance to establish a merchant marine for our country. Now that the chance has come, are these gentlemen — your friends — truly unwilling to help us with our own material, over such a small, modest request? Very well, Mr. Soheili — I shall call an international press conference and set out, in full, everything we have tried over the last century to develop our country, and how strong British opposition has stone-walled our efforts at every turn.”

Soheili, who knew my fearless streak well enough, said at once, “Oh, no, no, no — please, do not do that. Let me speak to them once more. I shall contact them first thing in the morning and telephone you immediately with the result.”

I told him this was my firm decision, and that he was free to convey it to them exactly as I had put it.

The next afternoon Soheili called and said, “I spoke to them and passed on your decision. They are prepared to agree, on one condition — that there be no flag discrimination on your side.” I replied, “Mr. Soheili, you know perfectly well that is simply an excuse. How could any government act against its own interest? Flag discrimination, in my view, is precisely against our own interest.” Soheili said, “They pointed to Onassis's own practice, and said the Iranian government might do likewise.” I told him, “If you are not able to assure them yourself that Iran will not discriminate by flag, then give them that assurance on my behalf, as Ambassador of Iran.”

The next day Soheili called back to confirm my assurance had been conveyed to B.P., who had in turn informed Shell in The Hague. Mr. Mehbod returned, and together we met Mr. Blumengarte, Managing Director of Shell. As we entered his office, he said, “I have been informed of what passed between you and London.” I said, “I am here to confirm it — no flag discrimination. Now, what is your next step?”

Blumengarte said that, with the assurance given, he would now make a favourable report to the Board.

With B.P.'s objection apparently removed, the question of capital to actually build the tankers remained. Mr. Mehbod had already toured America, Italy, and France seeking credit, without success. On 26th July 1955, he came to me and explained that securing credit from the Dutch Export Credit Bank required the consent of the Dutch Finance Ministry. I telephoned the Finance Minister at once and secured an appointment for noon that same day. I was not especially hopeful, knowing the British were, in principle, opposed to our tanker scheme, and that the Dutch, with B.P. and Shell wielding considerable influence within their own government, would be reluctant to displease them. With little real hope, Mehbod and I met the Minister at the appointed hour.

I explained our purpose — that as the tankers would be built in Holland, the credit would directly benefit Dutch exports; and that, since the order came from a financial body funded by His Majesty the Shah personally, he took a direct interest in the project, meaning there could be no realistic loss in permitting the Bank to extend the credit. The Minister agreed the matter deserved study, but said that if the Bank itself could be assured the credit instalments would

be paid on time, the Finance Ministry's own guarantee would hardly be necessary. He asked us, therefore, to secure the Bank's confidence first, since it was the Bank that bore the actual responsibility.

As I had expected, we left without a firm result. The only path left was to win the Bank's confidence directly, by assuring them the credit would be repaid according to the signed contract. Fortunately, this I managed, and it was arranged for Mr. Postuma, the Bank's Managing Director, to travel to Tehran himself. On 13th August, Postuma visited me to say he had decided to grant the necessary credit without his own Finance Ministry's guarantee, and that he would leave for Tehran on the 17th. I was overjoyed, and prayed he would not return disappointed.

Postuma returned from Tehran satisfied. Mehbod, too, came back, and on 6th October 1955 the agreement between the Bank and Mehbod, as Managing Director of the National Iranian Shipping Company, was signed.

To mark the occasion, I gave a dinner at the Embassy for more than thirty guests, including the late Professor Gerbrandy, directors of the Bank, and representatives of the Verolme United Shipyard of Rotterdam. We drank to the Shah's health. The event was telegraphed to Tehran the next day, to the then Prime Minister, the late Hossein Ala, whose reply — translated — appears in the preface to this book.

Mehbod returned to Tehran, and the Verolme Shipyard began building a new yard at Rozenburg, near Rotterdam, large enough to construct a tanker of 30,000 tons.

In early 1956, Mehbod returned to The Hague with eight young men to be trained as ship's mechanics and sailors, entrusted to the Verolme Shipyard, with two instructors assigned to oversee their training. To keep them from feeling too homesick, I arranged a monthly Persian lunch at the Embassy for the boys and their instructors. Their early training was difficult, but with my own close interest and encouragement they advanced quickly, applying themselves with real dedication. To keep their spirits up, I always reminded them that they could take pride in being the first group to fulfil what had, for generations, amounted to a national dream.

On the morning of 9th August 1956, while at work in my office, my Third Secretary, the late Peyamiras, came in to say that a Mr. A. P. — an Iranian — had come to see me. For a moment the name meant nothing, though it sounded familiar, until I recalled it from reports I had received back at the Ministry, of a man often noted among Fatemi's visitors. I told Peyamiras there was no particular need for him to see me personally, whatever he needed could be handled otherwise. Peyamiras said he had told him the same, but the man insisted — since he happened to be passing through The Hague, he wished to pay his respects to the Ambassador. “Very well,” I said. “Show him in.”

Mr. A. P. entered — a short, thin man, light-complexioned, with dark eyes and hair. His repeated visits to Fatemi, and his later journey to Baghdad, had always left me suspicious of him. On entering my office, he said, “Good morning, Mr. Meftah. I know you dislike me, but I have respect for you — and now that I was passing through The Hague, I felt it my duty to pay my respects.”

“I have never met you before, to like or dislike you,” I said. “What makes you think so?”

“That was simply my impression,” he said, and began introducing himself, producing photographs of himself alongside various Iranian and foreign figures, plainly meant to show his intimate connections with them — his way, I understood, of establishing himself as a well-placed operator. Having recently visited certain figures in England, he was now returning from London, and told me he expected changes there soon: the Conservative Party's left wing would take power, he said, and bring a wholly new policy toward Iran. He then went on to describe my own circumstances to me, dwelling pointedly, and rather unpleasantly, on my modest financial position and the burdens I carried — plainly meant to demonstrate just how well informed he, or his masters, were about people's private affairs back in Iran.

I asked him, “Mr. A. P., what exactly are you driving at?”

“As I said,” he replied, “there will be changes in England, and the Conservative left wing, once in power, will pursue a different policy toward Iran. To win Iran's sympathy, they wish to work with a group of patriotic, honest men. Among the Iranians they know, they have selected twenty — you are one of them. There is only one condition: that you climb down off Satan's donkey” (az khar-e sheytân pâyin biyâyid).

His phrase made me laugh, and it struck me that his masters were plainly unwilling to accept that even twenty honest, patriotic men might exist in Iran — and were using this little trick to try to discredit them instead.

A historic episode flashed to mind at that moment, worth setting down here. Soon after the First World War, at the Paris Peace Conference, the Iranian government sent a mission headed by the late Aligholi Khan Moshaver-al-Mamalek Ansari to present Iran's claims. The Allied powers, of course, never gave the Iranian delegate a real chance to be heard. Ansari responded with a vigorous press campaign in Paris, which drew attention across the world's newspapers. Lord Curzon, hoping to play a dirty trick on him, invited him to London — the plan being that as soon as Ansari arrived, British propaganda in Tehran could claim he had gone there simply to receive instructions. Ansari, cleverer than that, saw through Curzon's scheme at once, and declined the invitation!

I said, “Mr. A. P. — you told me I should climb down off Satan's donkey. What did you mean by that? I had thought I was riding nothing grander than a limping Persian donkey of my own.”

“I mean,” he said, “that you should abandon this fanatical antipathy toward England, and accept that we must come to terms with her.”

His answer reminded me of a conversation I once had with Ghods Nakhai, a former Minister of the Imperial Court, at the Chalet Suisse restaurant in The Hague, where he argued that coming to terms with England would leave us better off. I gave him several examples of past attempts to do exactly that, all of which had failed, and said that, given how ignorantly America conducted herself in the Middle East, I too believed we ought to come to terms with England — but only on a basis of equality and genuine national interest. There is a vast difference between coming to terms and simply being a yes-man. If they wanted a friend on equal footing, I was entirely at their disposal; but if they wanted a simple yes-man, that could never be me!

One point my compatriots, and any Briton genuinely interested in Anglo-Iranian relations, should bear in mind: during the hundred years of imposed capitulations, 1828 to 1928, Iran had no right to act or even to speak for herself. Her destiny lay in the hands of England and Russia. During that period, aggression and encroachment reduced her to half her former size; she was stripped of any real military force; and, condemned to serve as a scorched-earth buffer state, she was plunged into the most miserable conditions of life. Her underground wealth sat in British and American hands, her above-ground wealth was sacrificed to the same buffer-state policy — and had we ever signed the 1919 Agreement, even our nominal independence would have vanished entirely. Even now, with our underground wealth once more in their hands, they have not ceased interfering in our affairs. Taking all of that into account, I confess I do not know quite what they mean by “coming to terms.” I only wish these gentlemen had the courage to say plainly what they actually mean by the phrase. We had, besides, to remember our powerful northern neighbour, along a very long open frontier, and the need to maintain a genuine balance between the two.

I myself have always been on the best of terms with Britain. I married twice, both times to British women, and I am very happy with my wife — does that not prove my good terms with the British well enough? I am only sorry I am not rich enough to rely on Muhammadan law and take three further wives besides!

I repeated to Mr. A. P. what I had told Ghods Nakhai: “If they want a friend, I am at their disposal. If they want a yes-man, I am not their man.”

“Mr. Meftah,” he said, “you are mistaken.”

A few days later I learned that Mr. A. P. had been in Rotterdam, urging our students to abandon their studies, telling them Iran would never be allowed a merchant marine of her own, and that they were simply wasting their time. On hearing this, I found myself in a fresh struggle — working hard to counteract the effect of his talk on the boys.

Around the beginning of June 1957, Verolme, owner of the Verolme United Shipyard at Rotterdam, informed me the yard was ready to begin building the first tanker, to be named Reza Shah the Great, and asked that I attend on the 27th to lay her keel. I cannot describe the joy I felt seeing the work finally begin. My wife, Mehbod, and I duly went to Rozenburg on the appointed day; being the first vessel built in that yard, a great crowd turned out.

At the same time, a thousand-ton steamer for coastal service in the Persian Gulf was nearing completion at another yard, and my wife was invited to launch her — the Persepolis — on 14th September 1957. The weather that day was cold and rainy, but for me it was a joyful one all the same, watching our merchant marine finally take shape. I made a habit of visiting Rotterdam regularly to watch the ship's progress, photographing each stage, and counting down the days to her launch.

Two months after I laid the tanker's keel, Verolme came to me angrily to say construction would have to halt — the National Iranian Shipping Company had failed to send Bank Melli's guarantee and meet its other obligations, a lapse that had already resulted in the dismissal of the Bank's own Managing Director, since Postuma had opened the credit for the yard on the strength of assurances for which he now bore personal responsibility. I felt deeply ashamed, and angry besides. I telegraphed Tehran at once, reporting the harm done to the Bank's Managing Director through the delay in Bank Melli's guarantee. The guarantee reached The Hague two days later, but Postuma's own position, unfortunately, could not be reversed.

A few days after that, Mehbod arrived from Tehran with decorations for Professor Gerbrandy, the wartime Prime Minister, along with Postuma, Stein, and Verolme, presented to them at the Embassy's Norouz reception on 21st March, Persian New Year.

My term in The Hague was now drawing to a close, and I was preparing to return home, when the yard informed me that the tanker Reza Shah the Great would be ready for launching on 15th July 1957. I was sorry that my posting would end a month before that date, meaning I would not be there to see it — though deeply happy, nonetheless, that my own small effort had helped solve one of our country's genuinely important problems.

I informed Tehran of my planned departure date. A few days later, word came back that, by His Majesty's own order, I should delay my departure until after the tanker's launching. This was wonderful news. I cannot describe my happiness watching that great tanker slide majestically down into the water. My emotion was so overwhelming that, when Mehbod asked me to say a few words on the telephone to Tehran, I found I had no idea what to say.

On My Return I Found My Country an American Satellite

I am glad to say my four years in The Hague passed successfully in every respect. Securing financial credit from the Bank, obtaining B.P. and Shell's agreement for building the tankers, sending a group of NEDCO engineers and technicians to study the development of Persian Gulf ports, succeeding in reducing the import tax on Persian carpets, encouraging Dutch firms to make contact with Iran, and other useful, profitable work for both countries — these all formed part of what I achieved there. My relations with the Dutch Foreign Ministry were always friendly and warm, and I remain indebted to its senior figures, particularly the Ministers Lunz and Beyen, and the Director-General, Echosier. My habit was to settle matters through personal contact rather than formal exchanges of notes, whereas most missions kept their contact limited to official cocktails and receptions. The Belgian Ambassador, our Doyen, was an old-fashioned, reserved, unsociable man, quite unable to create any real warmth among the heads of mission — an attitude I, being naturally sociable and keen to build genuine contacts, found simply unacceptable.

Snobbishness might perhaps be forgiven in the representatives of two or three so-called great powers, but for a smaller nation, I always felt that a diplomat's popularity and warmth was itself a form of propaganda well worth cultivating. Respecting The Hague's traditionally snobbish diplomatic atmosphere was, for me, genuinely difficult. We never limited our receptions to senior officials and heads of mission alone, nor cut them off at any fixed hour — young and old alike were welcome, entertained generously, whether cocktails, dinner, or supper dances, often running well into the small hours.

I had my own particular way of drawing certain fellow diplomats into real friendship, so as to benefit from their experience. On arriving at a post, I would study my colleagues' manner, their social connections, and their engagement with international affairs, and from among them choose a few with whom to hold a rotating weekly meeting, so we could discuss international questions and share what each of us knew.

This way of living clearly served my wife and me well, and we became genuinely popular in The Hague — so much so that, on our departure, the diplomatic corps broke with its own tradition and presented us with a pair of beautiful large silver fighting cocks. The ceremony took place at the Australian Embassy, and it was heartening to see practically every mission, East and West, take part. By tradition the ceremony ought to have been held at the Canadian Embassy, the Canadian Ambassador being Dean of the diplomatic corps, but as the whole gesture was already a break from custom, the Australian Embassy was chosen instead — the Canadian Ambassador nonetheless joined in giving the gift. The Australian Ambassador was one of seven colleagues I would count as true confidants. My wife and I shall long remember and value their friendship, even if those two cocks remain locked in permanent battle at the centre of our dining table to this day.

Nor shall we forget the kindness of Dr. Lunz, the Dutch Foreign Minister, who left an official meeting in Paris simply to host our farewell lunch. At the table he said, “I came from Paris, where I was very busy, purely to be your host today, and I shall fly straight back to Paris once lunch is over. As you can see, I have gathered all your Dutch friends around this table — proof enough of your success in this country. I only hope our cold, rainy weather has not left you with an unpleasant memory of The Hague.”

I thanked him warmly for the lunch, and for the trouble he had taken in coming from Paris to honour us, and said that during our four years in The Hague, the warmth of my Foreign Ministry colleagues and Dutch friends generally had left me quite unable to feel the cold and damp of the place at all.

I mention Dr. Lunz's kindness because, only a few days before my own departure, the Ambassador of a great Asiatic country had left The Hague to a farewell marked by nothing more than a small dinner at the Chief of Protocol's house.

One point worth remembering about the countries of Western Europe: if a representative fails to earn a respectable reputation and genuine popularity, the local authorities will not hesitate, when the moment suits them, to make their displeasure plainly felt.

My success in The Hague, as at my earlier posts, came from cultivating a good, respectable name through gentle conduct and — not least — through a certain disregard for money. At no posting did my entertainment budget ever match my rather generous style of living and hospitality, so I drew on my own allowances, saving nothing at all for the future. My wife was always the best-dressed lady of the diplomatic corps, so much so that the papers occasionally photographed and even interviewed her on new fashions. I recall the Shah's own Chief of Protocol, Mr. Gharagozloo, remarking to me on the Shah's return from his visit to Holland, “Oh — so it was you, Mr. Meftah, who was so popular in The Hague?”

With that successful record behind us, we left hopefully for Tehran on 17th July 1958 — my wife, our two children, Bojang and Dey, and I — travelling in my own car. We left the great park of the Wilszang villa behind us, carrying with us the finest memories of my career.

We drove through Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey — a journey both fascinating and, in places, genuinely dangerous. Not expecting an active post waiting for me in Tehran, we travelled at a leisurely pace to avoid the worst of the heat on the Turkish and Iranian roads, though we still had to reach Tehran before 1st September for the children's schooling. We arrived there on that very day.

Two days later I called on the Minister of the Imperial Court, Mr. Ala, and afterward on senior officials at the Foreign Ministry. The permanent Undersecretary told me there was a suggestion I be sent as Ambassador to Baghdad. I pointed out that I had only just finished a posting abroad, and that regulations did not allow me to take up another foreign post for at least a year or two. He said they were already working on a legal way around that regulation. I told him I had never served in Iraq, and given the current situation there, I wondered whether I was really the right man for the job. “It has all been considered,” he said. “First, you already know Iraq well enough; and second, given the change of regime there, we need someone with real courage — that is why your name came up.” I said that, for the country's benefit, if I could be of use I had no objection, though I confessed I had no personal enthusiasm for it.

The suggestion of sending me to Baghdad came from the Ministry itself, not from Ali Asghar Hekmat, the then Foreign Minister, who was not even in Tehran when I arrived.

I met the Minister on 6th September. I learned nothing at all from him about my own position — nor had I really expected to. As a matter of principle, he — who had served in the early days of Zahedi's government as a Minister of State — had worked hard, alongside the Minister of the Interior, though ultimately without success, to become Foreign Minister himself, with the specific aim of pushing me out of the Ministry.

On reaching Tehran, I found the mood and situation quite different from what I had expected. The capital had come to resemble, in effect, a town under American occupation. It was said daily that the Americans were pressing the Iranian government to pass a law clearing out the generation who had worked under Reza Shah — considered by the Americans to be fanatical nationalists, too difficult to work with, and best replaced by a younger generation, particularly men with an American education.

This talk brought back something a Ministry colleague had told me a year earlier in The Hague, freshly returned from America: “The situation in Tehran is going to change completely — the Americans will be the leading power there.”

Here I must, in fairness, agree with the Americans on one point: those of us who had worked under Reza Shah strongly disliked foreign interference in our affairs, and certainly resented taking orders from foreigners. Curiously, I once heard from a Member of Parliament that the Prime Minister of the day had persuaded the Shah that anyone older than himself could never be relied upon to tell him the truth, and so could not be trusted. These beliefs, together with American pressure above all, pushed the government into passing a law permitting the compulsory retirement of anyone with thirty years' service, regardless of actual age.

By then I had more than thirty years of service myself, so the new law applied to me directly. Beyond that, my openly patriotic character, my lasting respect for Reza Shah the Great, my published book Armane Iran, and, not least, my own conduct at the Ministry throughout the Mossadegh and Zahedi years, had already put me on the blacklist of every foreign power with an interest in Iran — the great powers especially. A retirement order, when it came a few days later, could hardly surprise me. The law, needless to say, was not applied without exception — those with American backing, or an American education, kept their posts regardless.

I freely admit that a great many of our older generation, particularly among the upper classes with real influence over the country's policy, had become corrupted tools of foreign powers whose own economic and political interests kept Iran from any genuine development. But among that same older generation were patriotic, experienced, honest men who genuinely believed in transforming the people's miserable circumstances. Nor can I say those now holding the key positions are noticeably less pro-foreign, judging by the Tehran papers — they too owe their posts largely to foreign influence. Once Reza Shah's experienced officials were swept away by this American-imposed law, the departments filled up instead with so-called American experts, who ran everything. I remember visiting one department to obtain information about housing construction for Foreign Ministry staff — the nominal Persian director sat behind a large, handsomely furnished walnut desk, and yet, when I asked my questions, the answer came, to my surprise, from an American sitting quite innocently on the couch, sipping tea. Nor have I forgotten going to Mr. Ala to express my astonishment at a certain government decision, only to receive his familiar shrug: “What can we do, Mr. Meftah? The Americans wanted it, so it had to be done.” From all I saw, heard, and read in the Tehran papers after my return from The Hague, I found my own country had become an American satellite.

It was not long before I found confirmation of this view in David Horowitz's book, From Yalta to Vietnam, which reads: “The sequel to these events is not so widely known. As the Russians left, the Americans moved in — not with troops and revolution, but silently, with dollars, in support of the status quo. Along with American funds, the Iranian government received American advisers, civil and military. Iran, in effect, became an American satellite; if America did not yet have military bases there, she could have them any time she wished.”

For someone with as strong a patriotic feeling as mine, seeing the country reduced to such a state was genuinely painful, since I believed we could have carried out the very reform I set out in Armane Iran without any help from the American C.I.A. or its local elements. What, in the end, did we truly gain from American interference? Did our foreign exchange reserves grow — or did they, under the extraordinary pretext of “inflation of foreign exchange” (a term one searches for in vain in any economics textbook), simply fly off to Europe and America instead? Our agriculture fell to nothing, so that we had to import grain from America — Iran, a country that had exported wheat under Reza Shah's own reign! Our industry fell to nothing as well, thanks to an open-door commercial policy, and the foundry that had been nearly complete was looted by the occupying powers — while poor India, over the same twenty years, managed to build three foundries of her own. And still we were kept busy, stupefied by empty promises.

We knew perfectly well that industrialising the country required, first and foremost, a basic industry — a foundry. From the Shah's own interview with a New York Times reporter in December 1965, one can easily sense that America was far from pleased with our arrangement with the Russians to build one in Iran.

Back in Hamburg in 1951, I once asked Dr. Schacht and Dr. Loppenberg, an industrialist, whether a foundry was truly necessary. Their answer was unambiguous: industrialising any country requires a foundry first, without which it cannot even produce spare parts for its own machinery — and should the country supplying that machinery ever refuse, for whatever reason, to furnish spare parts, the whole industry would collapse, bringing unemployment and every other manner of hardship with it.

Photographs for this chapter



The Russian-built foundry at Esfahan

Special Status

In short, we are condemned never to advance quickly — kept, instead, in a permanent state of slow motion, forced to endure what I have come to call our “special status.” And to preserve that special status, certain hand-picked figures must remain in power in Iran, able to protect it. Today it is America that has taken on the responsibility of keeping us there.

What, exactly, was this “special status”? It is an interesting enough story that I think it worth setting down here, so that my compatriots — and the wider world — may understand why so much unrest and unease has always troubled Iran.

The Second World War was drawing to its close when the late Mr. Stokes, a Labour Party member and figure in the British government, was travelling with another gentleman through Turkey and Iraq to Iran. I was, at the time, Counsellor at the Iranian Embassy in Ankara. On his arrival there, Mr. Stokes asked Mr. Lomax, the Economic Counsellor at the British Embassy, to gather some economic information on Iran and suggest whom he might contact for it. Lomax thought it best to put him in touch with me. After a telephone call, it was arranged that I would join a dinner party Stokes was hosting at the Soraya restaurant — his schedule being too tight to accept my own invitation to tea instead. At the table sat the American Commercial Counsellor, a gentleman travelling with Stokes, and several others — ten of us in all.

Lomax, having had a few drinks before dinner, grew talkative. A sympathiser of the Conservatives, he spent much of the meal criticising Labour Party politics directly at Stokes, seated across from him, which left me unable to get much of a word in with Stokes myself. I turned instead to the gentleman travelling with him and asked whether he too was going on to Tehran. “No,” he said, “your country's currency-exchange formalities are far too difficult to permit any real transactions.” Just then I realised Lomax had broken off his sparring with Stokes and turned his attention to me instead. “That's because you're all Germans!” he said.

I was so taken aback that for a moment I could not find a word to say. I noticed Stokes's eyes fixed on me, his expression all but pleading with me to let the remark pass. But I remembered the old saying — that truth is often heard from a drunkard or a child — and asked him, quite softly, whether he had meant to address that to me. “Yes,” he said. “I mean to say the Persians are all Germans.”

“That is news to me,” I said. “I never knew it.”

“I mean your country is smothered in Germans,” he said.

“As far as I know,” I replied, “you yourselves rounded them all up — there were never more than seven hundred in the whole country.”

“Yes, I know,” he said, “but that number was quite enough.”

“You attach a great deal of importance to so small a number,” I said. “We never did — they were all simply working in factories, and, as you know perfectly well, every foreigner in the country was watched constantly and closely regardless.”

At that, he finally showed his true colours. He flared up and said, “Can any of you people actually tell me what it is you want? Do you imagine we want to seize your country?” He then began listing, one by one, every British colony he could think of, before concluding: “We only want your oil.”

“You have it, don't you?” I said.

“Yes,” he said, “but I want to know what YOU want.”

“Our request, I believe, is a very simple one,” I said. “We accept that our country has served as a buffer for your colonial interests — but you have other buffer states as well. Why can my country not be treated as one of them?”

“Such as?” he asked.

“Such as the Scandinavian countries — Holland, Belgium,” I said.

He raised a finger and said, “Oh, no — you must have a SPECIAL STATUS!”

I could see from Stokes's pale face how much Lomax's outburst had angered him, so I did not press the point further, though Lomax carried on regardless with his nonsense — or perhaps I should call it his confession.

In my heart I felt genuinely depressed — yet I was, at the same time, quietly glad to have finally heard, plainly stated, the true cause of all our troubles.

Stokes was deeply unhappy with Lomax's conduct, and sorry he had had no real chance to speak with me himself. I invited him, his companion, and the American Embassy's Economic Counsellor to tea at my own house the following day, so he could get the information he needed, and so I might have the chance to explain, briefly, some of our national grievances. All three accepted. I gave Stokes the economic information he wanted, along with a few useful contacts for his time in Tehran.

I then turned to our national grievances, giving him a short account of what Iran had suffered over the preceding two centuries under British policy, and finally touched on British conduct in Iran during and after the war — in particular, their blacklisting of Iranian businessmen, which had paralysed our international trade entirely. His reasoning was that these men had been trading with Germany. I told him that, as an industrialist and businessman himself, he ought to understand this rather better than the diplomats did, and gave him the example of an Iranian exporter then in Ankara with large stocks of various raw materials, whose agents in America, England, and France had all reported back “no demand, no quotations” — while his inquiry to the German market brought the answer, “any quantity, any price.”

“What would you do, Mr. Stokes, in his position?” I asked. “The war is over,” he said. “There is no reason to cling so fanatically to that blacklist.” He accepted my reasoning entirely, and before leaving Ankara used his own influence to have the blacklist modified.

I have wandered from my original subject — “special status.” My purpose in raising it is to make clear to my compatriots that it was precisely this special status that hampered our freedom of action. So long as we remained in the grip of its guardians, we could never act freely — kept dulled instead by deceitful words, so as never to take one truly effective, fundamental step.

Look closely at the ordinary proceedings of our daily life, and the real meaning of “special status” becomes clear enough.

In 1956, by the Shah's own order, a conference of heads of our European diplomatic missions was convened at the Iranian Embassy in Paris, chaired by the Foreign Minister of the time, Dr. Ardalan. At that conference I said: “We are not here to discuss and solve every country's problems — that is well beyond our capacity. We are here to study those parts of international affairs that touch our own national interest, and how best to protect them — because so long as we cannot resolve our international problems, we shall never be able to resolve our national ones. And to solve our national problems, we need public support; to earn that support, we must give the people a decent, comfortable life. That requires five things: cheap food, cheap clothing, cheap housing, cheap medical care, and cheap education.”

Mr. Raiis, our Ambassador in Paris at the time, endorsed these points himself. I told the conference that, in several reports, I had already set out how these five problems could be solved within three to five years.

How many hundred percent has the cost of living in Iran risen since that day? By how much has our 85 percent illiteracy rate actually fallen? I claimed then that I could reduce illiteracy to fifty percent within five years. Why was that claim never taken seriously? Why did no one even ask what my method would be? Because we were condemned to live under that famous British notion of “special status” — and now, with every aspect of our lives directed instead by the Americans, they too have found that same policy of “special status” the most convenient way to keep us endlessly occupied struggling against it.

I set all this down not to deepen any existing antipathy toward Britain or America among Iranians, but to reveal to the public of those countries, and to my own countrymen alike, the true cause of that antipathy — so that they might press their own governments to abandon so harmful a policy, and so that my countrymen might understand exactly what condition they are in, and where their misfortune truly lies.

We reached Tehran, in any case, on 31st August 1958, just in time for the children's autumn school term.

After the letter of appreciation I had received while still in The Hague from Mr. Ala, then Prime Minister, I confess I expected some proper reward on my return to Tehran. That reward duly arrived, in the form of a retirement order, issued under the new American-influenced law, at the age of fifty-eight, in recognition of thirty years' service to my country.

Some time later I received a telephone call from Mr. A. P., who greeted me in a rather cynical tone: “And how are you, Mr. Meftah?” I asked what exactly he meant by putting such weight on the question. “What did I tell you in The Hague?” he said. “You see now I was not talking nonsense.” I told him I had never rejected his view — one should expect exactly this, when a country is run by others.

The Anti-Corruption Commission

My colleagues at the Foreign Ministry, aware of the heavy expenses I carried and that my modest retirement pension could never cover them, felt themselves indebted to me for what I had done for them during Mossadegh's regime, and looked for a way to help. On the suggestion of Mr. Kafai, then Permanent Undersecretary and former Ambassador to Ankara, the Ministry's own members elected me Managing Director of the Ministry's Housing Corporation. At around the same time, Dr. Manouchehr Eghbal, the Prime Minister, issued a circular ordering a strong new campaign against corruption.

That order required a commission to review each official's file and prepare a report. Rightly or wrongly, given my reputation for impartiality and trustworthiness, I was chosen to chair it. I tried, at first, to avoid so delicate a responsibility, uncertain whether the whole exercise was genuinely serious, and unsure the report would truly be kept confidential as promised. Only after firm assurances that the Commission's findings would remain absolutely secret did I accept — on condition that no member be imposed on me. That condition, too, was accepted.

I chose Mr. Javad Ghadimi, former Ambassador to Jakarta, and Mr. Mahmoud Bahadory, former Ambassador to Prague, to work with me.

The further we progressed, the less enthusiasm we found ourselves able to muster for the task — though the Prime Minister's daily pressure kept us moving regardless. Finally, after some eight months, applying every possible leniency, we finished reviewing more than four hundred files. The Commission found seventeen individuals unsuitable to remain in the Ministry, and recommended in its report that their files be studied carefully before any new appointment was made. I sent a copy of the report to the Shah personally, through Mr. Ala.

Strangely enough, apart from a few who have since retired, most of those seventeen went on to hold important posts regardless. This oversight of the Commission's report brought to mind those American gangster stories, where criminals seek out information on a bank or institution's corrupted employees precisely so as to draw them into their own schemes.

Photographs for this chapter



Dr. Manouchehr Eghbal

Russia Proposed a Bilateral Defence Pact

Given my involvement with the Foreign Ministry's housing project, and as head of the anti-corruption commission, I had an office of my own at the Ministry, where I often received Directors and other members — and where, from time to time, they came to me for advice. These visits kept me well informed of what was happening within the Ministry.

Through the first months of 1959, Mr. Hekmat was still Foreign Minister. Rumours circulated that he was unhappy in the role, and considering resignation. I asked the Permanent Undersecretary one day whether there was any truth to it. “You know Hekmat is an ambitious man,” he said. “he will never give up his desk unless he is made to. But by the rumours, something unpleasant has been happening in our relations with Russia, and it may end badly for him — though the details are not yet clear.”

My own private inquiries suggested that, when Mr. Abdolhossein Masoud Ansari, the new Ambassador to Moscow, presented copies of his credentials to the Russian Foreign Secretary, the Minister had made plain Russia's displeasure at Iran having joined the Baghdad Pact. The new Ambassador reported this exchange back to Tehran. In Tehran itself, the Russian Ambassador had repeatedly conveyed his government's concern over both the Baghdad Pact and the Iran–American bilateral agreement, and, receiving no satisfactory response from our side, proposed instead a bilateral defence pact between Russia and Iran — which would, in effect, have rendered our agreement with America meaningless. Not long after, word spread that Seyed Ziaeddin Tabatabaii, with help from the former Iranian Ambassador in Moscow, Mr. Sayyah, was working to improve relations between Iran and Russia. One does wonder whether such a move could really have taken place without Britain's knowledge.

These approaches led to a Russian mission being sent to Tehran to conclude the treaty, instructed, it seemed, to accept whatever the Iranian side proposed — the mission was even received by the Shah. As Mr. Sayyah told me himself, “At the final meeting, Mr. Hekmat's manner so angered the Russians that the mission left without any result.” Was Hekmat truly the cause of that breakdown — or was it the American influenza then sweeping through the Royal Palace, so to speak? Radio Moscow's Persian broadcast of 16th February 1959, at 8 PM Tehran time, is worth recalling here: “The Iranian government showed interest in concluding a non-aggression pact with the U.S.S.R., and we, being equally interested in friendly relations with Iran, welcomed the Iranian view, and even instructed our mission to accept the Iranian proposals without amendment — yet now the Iranian government has gone back on its own position, and ended the conversation.”

Could this episode be taken as yet another sign that Iran had become an American satellite? Was it simple timidity on the part of our statesmen, or of whoever truly directed our international policy — the same timidity that had already delivered us into the Baghdad Pact?

Iran-Afghan Frontier Differences

The Iran–Afghan frontier and the Helmand water dispute have a long history behind them, going back to the Anglo-Iranian treaties of 1812 and 1814 — a fascinating story in its own right, though there is no space here to give it in full; a brief mention will have to suffice.

It began not long after the Napoleonic Wars, when Britain set aside her own commitments under those two treaties not to interfere in Iran's relations with Afghanistan — an omission that produced the very Helmand dispute still unresolved between the two countries today.

When I returned from The Hague, our province of Sistan was suffering a severe drought, its people emigrating either into Afghanistan or to other parts of Iran. A commission of representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Agriculture, War, and Foreign Affairs was studying the problem. The Foreign Minister was meant to chair it, but, fully occupied with his daily Ministry work, could spare little time for its meetings; his Undersecretary suggested he bring me onto the commission instead. On the evening of 24th January 1959, Mr. Kafai, the Permanent Undersecretary, telephoned to ask whether the current Minister of Justice, Dr. Sadr, had already been in touch with me. I said he had not. Kafai explained there was to be a change in the Helmand commission, and that Sadr wished to see me about it.

The next morning, Dr. Sadr, on his way to the Justice Ministry, left a card asking me to meet the Minister at eleven o'clock. I arrived a little early, hoping to see the Undersecretary first, and telephoned Dr. Sadr to join me in Kafai's office. He gave me a brief account of the commission's work and explained that a change to its composition and programme was in the offing, on which the Minister himself would give me a fuller explanation — the idea being to place someone from the Ministry at its head, and Sadr, given my seriousness and competence, thought me better suited to the role than anyone else. While we were still talking there, Mr. Hekmat was summoned to the Palace, and my own meeting with him was postponed to early February.

When it finally took place, after a few minutes' conversation we went together to join the commission, its members already gathered and waiting on the Minister's arrival. Hekmat introduced me, and discussion began at once on the Agriculture Ministry's proposal to send a senior figure to Kabul for one last round of talks with the Afghans before pursuing any further approach. I disagreed, and suggested instead a method that had worked well during Reza Shah's own time. The commission, while accepting my suggestion in principle, preferred to send someone to Kabul first regardless.

Hekmat reported the commission's decision to the Shah. The next day, at a luncheon at the Iran Club given in honour of Mr. Ashtiani, newly posted as Ambassador to Amman, Hekmat asked me to sit beside him, saying he had something to discuss.

He told me the commission's decision had been reported to, and approved by, the Shah, who had ordered that someone be chosen for the Kabul mission. Hekmat had proposed either Mr. Soroori, Mr. Sajadi, or General Jahanbani, and asked my opinion. Since Mr. Soroori had already been working with the commission for some time, and I knew him as an honest and capable man, I put him forward as my first choice, with Sajadi second. A few days later, Hekmat told me the three names had gone to the Shah, who had chosen General Jahanbani. I learned privately that Jahanbani was related to Hekmat, and that Hekmat had, in fact, suggested only his name to the Shah in the first place.

Jahanbani went to Kabul and, exactly as I had foreseen, returned empty-handed.

I held a particular view of our relations with Afghanistan, one I shared with Hekmat, and which he seemed genuinely to like — but, as I have already suggested, so long as our statesmen remain in the grip of foreign-influenced complexes, one can never truly expect them to adopt an independent regional, international, or even national policy of their own.

I have always believed we should regard Afghanistan much as we regard our own country — a rightful brother. This is only natural: we both occupy the greater part of the Iranian plateau, belong to the same race, speak the same language, share the same religion, and our political and literary histories are, in truth, inseparable.

When Afghanistan won her independence, our own public greeted it with real joy, and, as I recall, the Afghans expected us to give them every possible help in strengthening both their independence and their cultural development. But our statesmen, weighed down by the inhibitions bred of foreign domination, showed no serious interest in the matter at all — worse still, a man like Mr. Farrokh was actually sent to Kabul as our Ambassador, which proved a genuine mistake.

We were well aware that the great powers had every interest in keeping our relations with our own neighbours obscure and unfriendly — yet rather than resisting their manoeuvring, our statesmen's own conduct only reinforced it.

On his return from Kabul, Farrokh published a book about Afghanistan, distributed while I happened to be Acting Foreign Minister — I had to halt its distribution. What led him to write such a thing, if not those same fixed ideas that governed our statesmen's thinking?

As I proposed in Armane Iran, we should be laying the ground for a confederation of the states of the Iranian lands — Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq — beginning with a customs union between the three, on the model of the Benelux countries in Europe.

That was the thinking behind my request to Hekmat to set up a commission to handle Iran–Afghan questions and prepare a programme to put the idea into practice. I was never entirely certain whether his open approval reflected genuine conviction. In any case, it was not long before Hekmat himself fell victim to the strain in our relations with the Soviets, and the Iran–Afghan Helmand dispute was left, once again, uncertain and unplanned.

Mr. Gholam Abbas Aram succeeded Hekmat as Minister. Knowing him well, I could hardly expect him to engage with matters of such high policy. Never much of an administrator, his lack of ability soon caused real unease among the Ministry's own staff — including, notably, among the very colleagues who had helped him into the post in the first place.

They did not hesitate to approach me, asking that I do something to save the Ministry from disaster. Aware of my thirty years' collaboration with him, and of how I had fought Fatemi to protect the Ministry's interests, they hoped I might advise him on his administrative shortcomings.

There was no doubt the state of the Ministry's administration weighed on me heavily, but I never cared to interfere in another man's affairs unless he himself asked me to. In my view, a Minister ought to possess at least two qualities: first, to be married with children, so as to understand the responsibility of providing for a family; and second, to have at least some real grasp of administration.

Photographs for this chapter


General Jahanbani


Ali Asghar Hekmat


Gholam Abbas Aram

Electrification of Ninety-Two Towns of Iran

As 1959 drew toward its close, my financial difficulties grew ever more complicated and worrying. To help meet them, my wife decided to open an English class, hoping the teaching might ease our situation. It went well — her students, mostly girls preparing to travel to England, took full advantage of her gentle, retiring nature and lingered far longer than they ought to have, leaving her scarcely a moment's break between lessons. She taught over twelve hours a day, with only a break for lunch, until the sheer strain of it finally caused her to collapse — a moment of intense worry for me. I called Dr. Moayed Hekmat, our family doctor, at once and described her condition; he diagnosed a nervous breakdown, brought on by physical exhaustion and fatigue. She recovered her strength within a few days under his care, but had to cut back her teaching hours considerably, which naturally affected our income once more.

While we were still puzzling over how to balance our budget, an old and trusted friend, Mr. Yoones Vahabzadeh, then setting up a company to electrify ninety-two towns across Iran in partnership with the American firm Westinghouse, asked me to join his company's Board of Directors. I judged that a Board seat would bring in a substantial enough income to let us do without our smaller ones.

The Board was formed with Mr. Mohammad Khosroshahi (now Chairman of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce), Mr. Boozari (a former Minister of Justice), Vahabzadeh, and myself. The company was duly and legally registered.

Under the contract between Westinghouse and Vahabzadeh, Westinghouse was to electrify ninety-two towns, work to begin within seventeen months. Fulfilling so vast an undertaking called for capital of twenty-eight million dollars, for which the Tehran Electric Organisation guaranteed payment through eleven drafts, countersigned by the Minister of Finance, with the foreign-exchange transfer approved by the National Bank as well.

The single most important term of the contract was the fixed consumer rate: 1.25 rials per kilowatt-hour — a figure that would, without question, have sparked something like an industrial revolution in Iran, given that the going rate today runs to about seven rials.

The scheme mattered enough that the Shah, keenly interested as he was in the country's industrial development, gave Vahabzadeh his own support and encouragement in pursuing it. It required several trips to America and the outlay of over a million dollars and took more than two years to bring to its final stage. On what was to be his last visit to Westinghouse, the firm asked Vahabzadeh for fresh reconfirmation of the contract by the Tehran Electric Organisation, and fresh reconfirmation of the draft payments by the National Bank — even though the Bank had already guaranteed those very payments. Vahabzadeh hurried back to Tehran to secure the reconfirmations. On his return, Mr. Rahmat Atabaki, the Minister of the Interior (now Ambassador in Vienna), refused to reconfirm the contract. The Bank, likewise, declined, taking the position that its original confirmation had carried only moral, not binding, weight.

This bizarre conduct on the government's part left Mr. Vahabzadeh completely bankrupt; he fell ill and spent time in hospital in Baden-Baden, Germany, and now lives on a modest allowance from his brothers. With the Electric Company's collapse, I too lost any hope of improving my own financial position.

Photographs for this chapter



Rahmat Atabaki

Guardianship of Prince Ali

I was asked to join two or three further commissions, both inside and outside the Foreign Ministry — all of them honorary. The result of nearly two years' struggle was simply a growing overdraft with the Bank-e-Bazargani, for whose patience I remain genuinely grateful to its Managing Director, Mr. Tajadod.

I still needed some way out of my financial difficulties, so as to settle my debt to the Bank. With Gholam Abbas Aram as Foreign Minister, I could expect little help from that quarter — but it was not long before Aram was replaced by the late Yadollah Azodi. An old family friend, and a man I had personally helped secure the Ambassadorship to New Delhi during Mossadegh's time, he may well have felt, now that he headed the Foreign Ministry himself, that the moment had come to repay the gesture.

Some of my colleagues, retired by the same law that had caught me, suggested a petition be addressed to Queen Farah Pahlavi, recently married to the Shah. This was done, and the law was afterward applied somewhat less rigidly, since it had never in fact given the government the power to enforce it so broadly.

One day Mr. Azodi asked to see me, and proposed I take up a post in Nigeria, pressing me to decide quickly. Having weighed the conditions there, and the schooling available for my children — from whom I had no wish to be separated — I found Nigeria simply impossible. Azodi, eager to find me a post, discovered every position abroad already filled, and asked me to wait. While waiting on his efforts, I thought it best to write directly to the Shah, explaining my situation. I prepared the letter and gave it to Mr. Abdollah Entezam, Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Company, who had a standing audience with the Shah every two weeks to report on N.I.O.C.'s affairs.

On 23rd November I received a telephone call from Entezam, asking to see me on the 26th. He told me he had not, in the end, passed my letter to the Shah, preferring to discuss something with me first. He was, it turned out, responsible for overseeing the affairs of Prince Ali, but, too occupied with the Oil Company to spare the prince proper attention, had been asked by the Shah to find someone suitable to look after him. Not certain I would accept the role, Entezam began obliquely, asking whether I knew of anyone with the right character and qualities for such a guardianship. I named two or three retired Ministry colleagues, all of whom he knew well, but he was not satisfied with any of them,

and went on describing, at greater length, the qualities the role required. Sensing he was really aiming at me, but too diffident to say so directly, I asked him plainly whether he had me in mind. “Yes,” he said. “What do you think?”

I replied, “I had a great deal of sympathy for his father, though I do not know his mother. I wonder, too, whether the position truly suits me. Beyond that, from what I heard the Shah himself say in Hamburg in 1955, discussing the Prince's affairs with Mr. Zand, then our Ambassador in Rome, I gathered something of his own anxiety over the Prince's future, and learned a little of the Prince and his mother at the time. But to accept your proposal, I would need a respectable position at Court — Undersecretary to the Minister of the Imperial Court, say, with suitable pay.” Entezam doubted Mr. Ala, the Minister of the Imperial Court, would agree to take on an Undersecretary again, having once had one who displeased him — but promised to do his best to secure something respectable for me at Court all the same, adding that the Prince and his mother were no longer nearly as difficult as they had been five years before.

At his next audience, Entezam laid out my request and the difficulty of persuading me to accept the guardianship on the terms I had proposed. On 4th December, at 7.30 in the morning, no sooner had I entered his office than he said, “Mr. Meftah, congratulations. His Majesty was very pleased to hear you have accepted the guardianship of Prince Ali, and has ordered a Royal Decree granting you the rank of Ambassador, and appointing you Civil Adjutant, or A.D.C., to His Majesty. As for the salary you proposed, it has been agreed in principle — though since no one at Court receives so high a figure, His Majesty suggests half be paid monthly, and the other half as a year-end reward.”

The next day Mr. Ala telephoned, asking to see me on the 5th of December. I told him, “I am deeply honoured that my acceptance pleased His Majesty, though I have already told Mr. Entezam this is really a modest position in itself. What truly persuaded me is my own affection for the late Prince Ali Reza, who showed my brother and me such great kindness — he remembered us, and often asked after us. That small kindness leaves me obliged to do what I can for his son.”

On 8th December, as I was leaving for home to lunch, Mr. Azodi telephoned to ask what post I had taken on. “Why?” I asked. “I had an audience with His Majesty and proposed a post for you,” he said, “and His Majesty told me something had already been arranged.” He wanted to know what it was. I told him, and he was plainly annoyed that I had not consulted him beforehand — though when I had seen him only a few days earlier to ask if there was any news for me, he had told me simply, “Not yet.”

At my last meeting with Mr. Ala, it was arranged that I should come to him on Wednesday, 25th December 1960, to be formally presented to the Shah as Prince Ali's guardian. I arrived at 8.30 that morning as agreed, only to learn he had already left for the Private Palace. By tradition, the Minister of the Court is always the first to have audience with the Shah each day, so I followed him there and waited. From the comings and goings around me, I could see the Shah was extremely busy. Finally, around eleven, a Palace attendant led me up to His Majesty's working room on the floor above. At the door he paused and said, “His Majesty is seated on the right-hand side of the room,” before opening it.

On entering, I saw the Shah standing three or four paces from the door, Mr. Ala behind him. I bowed; the Shah extended his hand, which I kissed. Ala introduced me: “Mr. Meftah, one of the Foreign Ministry's oldest and most experienced officers.” The Shah spoke of the Prince: “This child is my brother's son, and I am concerned that he be properly raised and educated. Unfortunately, he is living in an unpleasant, harmful atmosphere quite contrary to what I wish for him. He is, after all, a Prince, and should be raised as one.” He went on to describe the circumstances of the Prince's mother. I told him I would do my best, and, referring to the difficulties I had already been told of, asked for His Majesty's help in overcoming them.

Mr. Ala turned to me and said, “Mr. Meftah, the Prince's mother is called Madame Sholsky — shol, in Persian, meaning soft — but remember, she is very seftsky, which in Persian means very hard.” At this small joke, the Shah and I both burst out laughing despite ourselves. As I took my leave, the Shah said, “In any case, study the matter properly, and report back to me afterward.”

Accepting the post did, to some extent, secure my expenses, though not enough to clear my existing debts. What was more, the humiliating conduct of the Prince's mother and grandmother — Polish by birth, though naturalised French — was simply unbearable. The ten months I spent in their company amounted, in truth, to a kind of mental torture. Even so, over that period I managed to improve their relations with the Royal Family: I secured permission for Madame Sholsky to style herself “Madame Pahlavi,” raised her monthly allowance by 20,000 rials, and moved her from a shabby house in town to a handsome one in Shemiran, with a large garden and swimming pool. I put Mr. M. Z. Behrooz, a well-known and capable man, in charge of the Prince's Persian-language studies. Those ten months

struggling with the Prince's mother and her family would make an interesting story in their own right — one I would rather not set down in any further detail here.

In the meantime, the Cabinet changed, and Mr. Ghods Nakhaii was recalled from London to head the Foreign Ministry. I was also, around this time, a member of the National Archives Committee, chosen for the UNESCO Committee on the strength of the wide knowledge I had gathered touring Europe in 1936–37 to study their existing administrative systems. The committee tasked me with drafting a law establishing a National Archives Office — an institution my country badly needed.

After two or three sittings, the committee's recommendation was approved and sent on to the Ministry of Education, under the title “Proposed law draft for the preservation of National Archives, drawn up by Mr. A. H. Meftah, and approved by the Committee.”

The draft went to the Ministry of Education — and, as with so many other projects in my country, nobody knows quite what became of it afterward.

Photographs for this chapter



Tajadod



Abdollah Entezam Ghods Nakhaii

PART III
Ambassador to Tunisia

Prince Ali's mother's poor conduct kept me constantly uneasy, and I found myself turning over ways to escape so disagreeable a situation. Before I could settle on any real plan, I received a call from the Foreign Ministry saying Ghods Nakhaii wished to see me, if I could call on him the following day. He told me he was unhappy with the way our diplomatic missions were being run, and had wanted to send me to Bern — but the Ambassador there, his four-year term already finished, had come to Tehran and, through an audience with His Majesty, secured a further year's extension. The only post left open, he said, was Tunisia, and he asked my opinion. I told him, “You know Tunisia is not really the right post for me — but given how thoroughly disagreeable my present situation is, I would accept almost anything to get away from Tehran.”

Ghods Nakhaii acted at once and obtained the Shah's consent — though I learned some years later that the Shah had not, in fact, been at all pleased to see me leave the Prince's guardianship. As soon as my appointment order arrived, I sent my wife and son ahead to London for his schooling, and on 22nd November 1961, with my daughter Dey, set off for Tunisia.

My wife and I had arranged to meet at Rome airport on the 23rd, to fly on to Tunisia together. It was a very rough flight, but we came through it, fortunately, without falling ill. After presenting copies of my credentials to Dr. Moghadam, the Tunisian Foreign Minister, on 27th November, and my full Letters of Credence to President Habib Bourguiba on 4th December, I turned my mind to actually getting to work — remembering Mr. Abdollah Entezam's own 1958 report on North Africa, urging the need to establish proper diplomatic relations there. I set myself to the task, only to find an Embassy with almost no means for real work at all — no collaborator to speak of, a Second Secretary who knew neither French nor Arabic, and a locally engaged Persian secretary I could not trust in the slightest.

The Embassy itself was a small, comfortable villa of white marble, far from ideal as an Embassy building, though it stood in a large garden with ample room to build a proper Ambassador's residence and office within its grounds.

In any case, I had to work within an Embassy whose atmosphere was, frankly, discouraging — no archives to speak of, no files on the various Tunisian parties, papers, or personalities, and, worse still, nothing at all on the Algerian Provisional Government, despite the Embassy having been established some five years before, by which time such basic working files ought to have existed.

My arrival in Tunisia coincided with the Bizerte crisis, which had brought about a diplomatic rupture between France and Tunisia. In my introductory calls on colleagues, I tried, as tactfully as I could, to gather a true picture of what had actually happened at Bizerte.

My contact with Tunisian officials and fellow diplomats soon convinced me that Tunisia was, in truth, a fascinating place from which to come to know White Africa — or, as the local population call it, the Maghreb. I found myself quite wrong to have disliked the posting while still in Tehran, and set myself to studying its problems in real depth.

The Bizerte incident was the first thing to draw my curiosity. I made good use of my early conversations with fellow diplomats to establish whether the Tunisians involved had, in fact, been armed. Every colleague I asked, save one, confirmed they had not. The one exception, from Western Europe, told me photographs taken that day showed otherwise — though I never saw any such photographs myself. Nor, for that matter, was any Frenchman reported killed or even wounded in the incident. Its aftermath saw the departure of every French technician, doctor and teacher, paralysing Tunisia's economy at a stroke. Strangely, the public's own reaction amounted to little more than smiles and harmless demonstrations in Tunis, even as foreigners and embassies alike braced for something far stronger.

A further effect was the temporary damage done to Bourguiba's own prestige, which gave President Nasser of Egypt an opening to mount a fierce propaganda campaign against him.

The conduct of the French garrison at Bizerte, which left some fifteen hundred young Tunisians dead, provoked such a strong reaction in France that rumours circulated of the garrison's commanding officer having acted without orders from Paris — a rumour never substantiated, since General de Gaulle himself sent a telegram of appreciation to that same officer. Another explanation offered for the garrison's conduct was that France, then heavily engaged with the Algerian question, could not, for the sake of her own prestige, be seen to act otherwise.

Most foreigners, knowing President Bourguiba to be a shrewd man, found it hard to believe he would have allowed such a demonstration given the circumstances, and it was said he had simply been misled by certain fanatical members of his own entourage.

There is no doubt the Bizerte incident brought both Tunisia and France great worry and sorrow in the first instance. But, in my own view, it should be acknowledged that Algeria's liberation owes a real debt to the blood of those fifteen hundred young Tunisians who fell at Bizerte.

The closure of every French economic and commercial establishment, and the departure of its technicians and doctors alike, left the field open to other nationalities, particularly technicians from Eastern Europe. Among the foreign doctors who remained were twelve Iranians, with their families, and I was genuinely pleased to find, on inquiry, that all was well with them.

It was not long before Tunisia resumed diplomatic relations with France. Despite the ugly memory of Bizerte, the public welcomed that resumption, well aware that it was their economic and commercial ties with France — always the best buyer of Tunisian goods — that would truly bring prosperity to the country.

Another matter that drew my attention was the movement toward a union of the three North African countries — Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia — championed most strongly by Tunisia and Algeria. The perennial difficulty was simply who would lead it. The Tunisians argued theirs was the only one of the three able to preserve its own autonomy, with a long-standing administrative system and superior cultural institutions, and, above all, that it was President Bourguiba himself who had laid the union's first stone, establishing the Maghreb Bureau while still in exile in Egypt.

Morocco, for her part, claimed to have struck the first mortal blow against the French Empire, having pulled herself free of French rule earlier than either of her neighbours, and to have preserved her monarchy throughout.

Algeria maintained that, given the enormous sacrifices of her seven-year war of independence, and being both more populous and wealthier than the other two, she alone had the true right to lead. To some extent, hers may have been the more justified claim: it was, after all, the Algerian Abdelkader who first raised the cry for a Maghreb union, fighting the

French from 1822 to 1874 in pursuit of it — and had his Moroccan ally not been defeated, he might well have succeeded.

In 1962, a meeting between the leaders of Algeria and Morocco took place to explore the union's prospects, and a mixed commission was set up to study the matter and draft a working programme. I have yet to hear of that commission's success. It should not be forgotten, either, that Nasser — nursing his own ambition of an Arab empire under his own leadership — opposed any rival union, and kept his agents busy stirring propaganda against it, particularly in Tunisia and Morocco. But his efforts, as we know, came to nothing, since none of the three Maghreb countries was prepared to accept a leader drawn from the Arabs of the Near East. I heard from several prominent Algerians and Tunisians that they regard the Maghreb Arabs as considerably more civilised and advanced than their Middle Eastern counterparts, and I came to understand that whatever occasional sympathy they showed toward Nasser was chiefly a way of irritating the Western powers.

The Maghreb question interested me enough that I began collecting documents on it in earnest. In my first report, drawn from that early study, I gave a brief account of each country's situation, its internal problems, and its difficulties with its neighbours, promising a fuller report once my study was complete. The Shah, I later learned from a personal letter from Mr. Ala, the Minister of the Court, read that first report with real appreciation.

The situation across North Africa, and in Tunisia especially — which, by President Bourguiba's own description, served as something of a capital for the Algerian cause — drew a number of countries without representation there to send someone to watch and study events. For a time the world's attention was fixed squarely on North Africa, and on Tunis in particular. Then, quite suddenly, on 10th August — my wife's birthday, as it happened, with the children and me preparing to celebrate — I received a telegram from Gholam Abbas Aram informing me that, given the country's tight finances, the government had decided to close five Embassies, Tunis among them. I was instructed to call on the Tunisian Foreign Minister and convey the decision. The telegram said nothing whatsoever about my own personal situation. It goes without saying how badly this news upset my wife and children. “What a lovely birthday present from your friend Aram,” my wife said.

To reassure my wife and children, I told them the government would most likely send me on to Madrid instead, since our representative there was due to complete his term in about a month. I was wrong — European posts went only to favourites, and I was not among them. A few days later a telegram instructed me to go to Saudi Arabia instead. Saudi Arabia was, admittedly, of far greater importance to Iran than Tunisia — but my own circumstances made Riyadh simply unworkable. My son was at school in England, my daughter at the French school in Tunis, and my wife, being English, could not accompany me to Riyadh or Jeddah at all — meaning I would have to send my wife and daughter either to England or back to Tehran. The question was whether my finances could bear the extra strain of splitting my income three ways, on top of my existing overdraft — they simply could not. In a properly run country, matters would surely have been handled differently; but in mine, where the Minister possessed not the slightest grasp of administration or regulation, and no family responsibilities of his own to draw on for understanding, one could hardly expect much human consideration. The weight of it all put me to bed with a nervous breakdown lasting over two weeks.

This decision by the Iranian government not only upended my own life but genuinely surprised the Tunisian Foreign Ministry and its diplomatic corps as well — even the diplomatic corps in Athens, where our own Ambassador told me his colleagues had asked him outright why Iran would take such a decision at so sensitive a moment.

Even so, I forced myself out of bed to see Dr. Moghadam, the Tunisian Foreign Minister, on 14th August 1962, and conveyed Tehran's instructions. He was both surprised and plainly displeased. “I am certain the President and Prime Minister will not be pleased to hear this,” he said. “The President surely does not expect His Majesty the Shah to place Tunisia in the same category as Greece and Ethiopia” — non-Muslim countries whose embassies were being closed alongside ours — “and given the respect and admiration we hold for Iran, your government's decision can only be seen as unfriendly.”

That last phrase left me deeply uneasy. I did my best, without success, to convince him there was no unfriendly intent behind the decision. Dr. Moghadam, a frank and revolutionary sort of man, could not hide his true feelings, and repeated the phrase “unfriendly decision” several times over the half-hour I spent with him. I reported the conversation to Aram in full detail. When Aram realised his own ill-considered decision had upset and surprised the local authorities, he sought, to protect himself, to persuade the Shah that the phrase “unfriendly decision” had been my own

invention — that I had simply not wanted to leave Tunis. This baseless claim so angered the Shah that, on my return to Tehran, my request for an audience with him was refused outright.

The great difficulty Iran faced was that the Shah, unlike his father, a man not easily deceived, was himself rather whimsical and easily misled — I know of several interesting cases myself, such as how Jalal Bayar had once talked him into joining the Baghdad Pact.

After talking it over with my wife, the only solution we could find was to sell the few carpets we owned and send her and our daughter to London, so our children's education would not be interrupted, while I returned to Tehran alone.

In Tehran I found, quite unexpectedly, the mood of both the Imperial Court and the Foreign Ministry turned against me. The harder I tried to find someone willing to hear me out, the less success I had. My situation went from bad to worse, and I could see my life, and my family's along with it, drifting toward real peril.

As I said, after returning to Tehran I repeatedly requested an audience, and was eventually instructed to set down in writing my reasons for wanting one with the Shah. I did so at once and passed it to him through Mr. Entezam. In that petition I criticised the Foreign Ministry's mistake in closing the Tunis Embassy, and proposed a remedy which, had it been accepted, would have improved my own situation as well, easing the deep worry and strain I had been suffering.

While waiting in the private Palace's antechamber, Mr. Entezam returned from his audience and, handing my petition back to me, said, “His Majesty read your petition and asked that it be returned to you, since he did not wish it to fall into other hands — and said he would give the necessary instructions to Aram directly.”

Entezam added that the Shah was cross with me. “What for?” I asked. “For the line in your report from Tunis,” he said, “claiming the Tunisian Foreign Minister used the phrase 'unfriendly decision' — His Majesty was told you invented it yourself, because you did not want to leave Tunis.” I replied that His Majesty had no cause to be angry, since that was Dr. Moghadam's own expression, which I had felt it my duty to report faithfully.

After six months of worry and distress, I finally learned who had truly caused me all this trouble and loss. I thought it might be worth writing to Dr. Moghadam, now Tunisia's Ambassador in Paris, and asking him, tactfully, to confirm his own use of the phrase “unfriendly decision” to Aram directly, so that he might see for himself that Meftah was no liar — had never told one and never would.

The next day I met Mr. Entezam and discussed my plan with him, asking what Dr. Moghadam would think of our own administration if this went further. I asked him, at his next audience, to request one of three things on my behalf: first, that I be permitted to write to Dr. Moghadam myself, as I had explained; second, that instructions be issued to Mr. Raiis, our Ambassador in Paris, to contact Dr. Moghadam directly and clarify the matter; or third, that I be allowed to travel to Paris myself and meet Dr. Moghadam in Mr. Raiis's presence — this last, should the Shah still doubt the truth of what I had reported from Tunis.

Photographs for this chapter



Jalal Bayar



Mohsen Raiis

Ambassador to Oslo

The few hundred pounds my wife had taken to London, meant to cover our children's education and lodging, was nearly spent, and she began considering using her maiden name to look for work that might at least cover her flat's rent. A month later, I received the Royal Decree appointing me Ambassador to Oslo.

I left Tehran for Oslo on 19th April 1963. At the airport, the Chief of Protocol, who met me and took me to my hotel, explained that with King Olav and the Foreign Minister both away in London for Princess Alexandra's wedding, the presentation of my credentials would have to wait a few days — he suggested I leave copies of my Letters with him and use the time to fetch my wife and daughter from London instead.

A good suggestion, so I left for London the next day; the Danish Royal couple, also travelling to the wedding, happened to board the same plane at Copenhagen. That week in London, reunited with my wife and children, was a genuinely pleasant one. Princess Alexandra's wedding to Angus Ogilvy broke up their otherwise routine days, and they enjoyed racing about trying to catch a glimpse of the newly married couple. I left London on 28th April with my daughter, leaving my wife behind until our son returned to his school in Dorset at the end of his holidays.

At eleven the next morning I called at the Foreign Ministry in Oslo to pay my first visit to the Foreign Minister and other senior officials. Being Iran's first Ambassador to Oslo, I expected the usual difficulties in getting an Embassy properly running. I had been through this before — sent to Hamburg in 1950 to establish our Consulate-General there with no initial funds at all, in a Germany still lying in ruins, towns still buried under rubble, scarcely a house in Hamburg with running water. Even so, I managed to establish the Consulate — not through my own effort and eagerness alone, but with real help from the local authorities and from one of our own merchants there, Mr. M. Khosroshahi, now Chairman of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, to whom I remain grateful.

Establishing an Embassy in Oslo without initial funds, then, was nothing new to me. There were, at least, suitable hotels to start from. With no staff to help me, I judged it simplest to run the Embassy from a hotel, and chose the Oslo Grand Hotel, right in the heart of town, a short walk from the Foreign Ministry.

Oslo is a small city of some 600,000 people, ringed by pretty hills and fjords, with a genuinely pleasant atmosphere — a fitting place, I felt, for a man who had spent the last two years in one nerve-wracking struggle after another.

What first drew my attention was the May Day parade — the different guilds and their flags marching in orderly fashion with no police presence required at all, a real sign, it seemed to me, of a nationally disciplined character. Outside rush hour, one scarcely saw a policeman anywhere on the streets — a striking contrast to Tehran, where the undisturbed unruliness of drivers, taxi and military alike, makes police presence a constant necessity, justified or not. The Norwegian working class strikes one as slow and easy-going, perhaps a natural consequence of a very high standard of living — the minimum income runs to 16,000 kroner a year, the maximum around 22,000. I recall a small stretch of Karl Johans gate under repair when I arrived, and it stayed that way for months. I asked my dentist, whose clinic sat on the same street, why such a small job was taking so long. He laughed and said, “Oh, it isn't complicated at all — in another country it would take a few days. But our workers are very easy-going, and their motto is: if it isn't finished today, we'll leave it for tomorrow.” “That must be expensive,” I said. “Not really,” he said. “The men patching that hole are municipal workers, and Oslo's municipality is very rich.” It took several more months to finish regardless.

Another thing that caught my attention — and I suspect catches every foreign visitor to Norway — was the notably free way of life among Norwegian youth, the girls in particular. A movement had lately started, led by the Moral Rearmament group (if “sect” is even the right word for it), pushing back against this, especially among teenage girls. There was a feeling in Oslo, now that the Socialist government was out of office, that something ought to be done about it. Among the diplomatic corps, one heard suggestions that certain Eastern European countries actively encouraged moral laxity outside their own borders.

In any case, the King returned from London and I presented my credentials on 17th May 1963 — a simple ceremony in Norway, held that day at eleven in the morning.

My first month passed in a round of courtesy calls on fellow diplomats — undoubtedly the best way to gather information and get to know both the country and one's colleagues. It was through these meetings that I learned Norwegians, like other Scandinavians, know remarkably little of the wider world. Outside Scandinavia — England excepted — most people there know almost nothing; beyond a small circle who had served in the diplomatic corps, in business, or the merchant marine, most could not even locate Asia or Africa on a map. That was why one of an Asian or African diplomat's chief duties in Scandinavia was simply introducing his own country by whatever means possible — today, television being the most effective tool, provided the host country's authorities are willing to inform their public of real conditions in Asia and Africa.

Before I left Tehran for Oslo, some Moral Rearmament friends gave me a letter of introduction to their members there, who proved genuinely helpful in meeting local people, and even lent me their hall to show films and give lectures introducing my country.

The Scandinavian countries, Norway especially, remain largely unfamiliar with anything outside Europe — though Africa's own struggle for freedom and independence has at least brought that continent to their notice, so much so that any unfamiliar country tends to be assumed African by default. Mention Iran, and one is likely to be asked where in Africa it lies, and when it gained its independence.

One amusing episode is worth recounting here. Each year, the Norwegian Red Cross organises a “Red Cross Week” of fundraising collections. In 1964, the Red Cross chapter in Trondheim decided to hold an “Iranian Bazaar” at the town's largest hotel, without the faintest idea where Iran actually was. The Chairwoman of the Trondheim chapter wrote asking what help the Embassy could offer, and I asked that they send a responsible representative to discuss it. The lady in charge of the Trondheim section duly came, and I invited her to tea one afternoon. Her expression on arrival made plain she had not expected to find my wife and me dressed in European clothes, in a house furnished in European style. My wife, noticing this, said without hesitation, “It seems you were expecting to meet people rather different from us — different in appearance, perhaps, dressed in long robes and sitting cross-legged on the floor?” The lady admitted it frankly, confessing that they had simply assumed Iran was one of the newly independent African countries. I then had to show her my country on a map and give her a brief history of Iran. Her lack of knowledge only spurred me to help make their Bazaar a real success. I contacted my merchant friends in Hamburg and the Iranian Red Lion and Sun society for help, and was delighted by how quickly and generously they responded. The Norwegian Red Cross's plan was to serve an Iranian menu for the evening, and my wife travelled to Trondheim to help the hotel's cook prepare it.

Most unfortunately for my wife and me, our only daughter was killed by a tram shortly before Red Cross Week, and my wife was no longer able to travel to Trondheim. I was glad, all the same, to see the hotel's cook succeed in preparing the Iranian menu, which everyone enjoyed.

The Bazaar was held in Trondheim's large and famous Hotel Britannia, beautifully decorated, its handicrafts and samples of Iranian produce lending it a genuinely rich atmosphere. It was so well attended that not a single chair remained empty. I only wished my wife and daughter could have been there to share the evening, as the other five hundred guests did.

A few days later, the Chairman of the Norwegian Red Cross, with two of his assistants, called on me to present a plaque marking the Bazaar's success — owed, in truth, to the generous gifts sent by the Iranian Red Lion and Sun and my merchant friends in Hamburg, to whom I remain indebted.

After a long search, I finally found a proper house for the Embassy and set up my office there. With that settled, I found time to study Norwegian life, the local mentality, and how the country conducted both its national and international policy. Looking into Norway's commercial relations with Iran, I noticed our trade passed almost entirely through Germany or England as intermediaries. I thought it worth working to bring what little direct commercial contact we had into a more genuine footing. To that end, I arranged to accompany the Chairman of the Norwegian Export Council, along with four other Council members from various industries, on a visit to Tehran. I left on 16th April 1964, on the first flight of a newly opened weekly Oslo–Tehran route.

Norway, at the time, was working hard to move beyond her old reliance on fishing alone, developing new industries such as aluminium and textiles, and looking for markets for these new products — organising industrial exhibitions in various countries toward that end. The “Norwegian Week” held in Tehran seemed, on the Norwegian side, a real success; on the Iranian side, unfortunately, nothing much came of it. I pressed for a proper commercial treaty between the two countries, so the benefit would not run entirely one way, and sent a copy of Norway's recent commerce treaty with Japan to show Tehran how such agreements were properly drawn up to avoid lopsided advantage. With Norway now producing manufactured goods, we might have arranged our trade to open a market for our own products and raw materials as well. Unfortunately, my efforts here, too, produced no response from Tehran.

The one thing I did manage was to secure a work permit for an Iranian merchant in Norway, so that direct contact could be established through him as the sole channel for introducing Iranian goods — bearing in mind how nearly impossible it is for a foreigner from a country with no commercial treaty with Norway to work there at all. Norwegian factories, for their part, gave two excuses for avoiding Iranian raw materials: first, that they already had established American or

Egyptian suppliers they were reluctant to change, and second, past unpleasant experience with discrepancies between Iranian sample goods and the actual shipments.

To encourage the Iranian merchant regardless, I joined him in setting up a small company under the name “Tehran Huset” (“Tehran House”), which I intended to manage myself once my Oslo posting ended. The capital we invested was modest, since neither of us could spare much, but my long-standing friendship with several compatriot merchants in Hamburg, and their trust in me, secured a substantial credit in kind from them — a generous gesture I shall always remember.

Another matter that drew my attention in Norway was its strategic position between Russia and the Western world, England especially.

The Scandinavian countries are generally seen as buffer states for England against Russia, which is why they lean naturally toward Britain, even as Russia works hard to penetrate that buffer zone, seeking concessions on Norwegian Arctic islands. Norway's strategic position closely resembles Iran's, both countries bordering Russia by land and sea alike. NATO's establishment only sharpened Norwegian awareness of this strategic importance. Around the middle of 1963, Mr. Erik Qvam, a retired colonel, published a booklet titled Norway, a Frontier State, comparing Norway's strategic position to that of the Baltic states, annexed by Russia, and arguing that Norway was, if anything, more valuable to Russia still. He wrote that Russia's transformation of the Kola Peninsula into a major ballistic-missile, air, and naval base had brought the entire Norwegian coastline under Russian surveillance — a surveillance requiring ever more space to sustain. He judged Russian naval power, built up through these very means, to rank second only to America's, a strength that would take NATO a long time to overcome.

Colonel Qvam's booklet was widely read in Norway as an echo of the French suggestion that NATO itself be armed with nuclear weapons.

From my own principal Norwegian contacts, I gathered real unhappiness with NATO membership. Before the Second World War, they told me, Norway had always lived quietly, contentedly, free of scandal; NATO membership, they felt, had dragged her into an arena at odds with her own political and economic interests, particularly given how it invited constant pressure from Russia. Among Liberals, some believe a collective, positive-neutrality pact among the Scandinavian countries would serve far better, pointing to Sweden's own neutrality throughout the war as proof. There is something to this view, provided the Scandinavian countries together could build a defence force genuinely strong enough to protect them. Norway's geography certainly offers real defensive advantages for fortification — but it is doubtful her small population could bear the enormous expense of a modern defence plan on its own. During the war, the Germans built an extensive and valuable chain of fortifications across Norway, every one of which was demolished once the war ended.

One passage in Qvam's booklet, comparing Finland and Poland, stands out: “From the point of view of small, weak states, it is regrettable that the democracies' response depends on the victim's own strength and capability — but it remains, all the same, a truth that must be faced: the capable receive help, while the slack and inefficient are left to their fate.” Iran, I might add, is a fine example of that very truth.

Reading that line brought back a remark made to me, during the war, by the late Dr. Khalif, a Russian émigré in Tehran, when we discussed how differently the Finns and Poles had defended their countries. He said the difference lay in this: the Finnish farmer is genuinely attached to his own land, and so to his country — whereas the Pole's attachment runs instead to the braid on his uniform.

Iran's Land Reform Film on Norwegian TV

While busy introducing my country through bulletins and lectures, I received a telephone call on 15th May 1964 from Mr. Bjerkholt, a journalist friend, telling me a film on land reform in Iran was to be televised at ten that evening. I had been invited to an Italian concert that night, and had to explain to my host, the Italian Ambassador, why I would need to leave before it ended.

The film, as it turned out, showed nothing but the hardships and difficulties of peasant life in Iran, with no mention at all of the new schools, hospitals, universities, or industrial development under way. Watching it left me deeply uncomfortable, and brought back a film I had seen some thirty years earlier in Quetta, where I served as Vice-Consul,

shown at a dinner party by C. Skrine (now Sir C. Skrine) — in which the only brick building visible anywhere was the British Embassy in Tehran.

It goes without saying how unpleasant it was to watch this new film, particularly once the Shah himself commented on it. I spent two or three days weighing what to do, and in the meantime made inquiries into the film's origins. It had, I learned, been produced by an English company, and shown first in Milan before reaching Oslo.

The next day, a Norwegian gentleman who had spent two years in Iran called on me and asked whether I had seen the film, and what I made of it. I told him frankly it had not appealed to me at all. “Nor to me,” he said. He went on to tell me his own father had rung him up, reproaching him for having told so many lies about Iran — the film's picture of the country was so at odds with what the son had described from his own time there. He had answered his father, “If a film were made in Lapland about how Norwegians live up north, and shown in Tehran as representative of life in Norway, how would you feel about that?” That explanation satisfied his father, though he still asked—

Photographs for this chapter



Land reform — from right: Arsanjani, Ala, Mohammad Reza Shah, Amini, Abdolhamid Hakimi

The Death of Dey, My Only Daughter

In Oslo there was no school where diplomats could send their children for lessons in English or French. The Americans ran a ten-grade school for the children of NATO officers serving in Norway; the British had a six-grade school of their own. My children had attended the American school in Tehran.

When I was posted to Tunis, I sent my son with my wife to England to continue his studies, and took my daughter with me to Tunis. My wife, however, could not bear to be separated from her, and joined us there. As there was no English-speaking school in Tunis, I had no choice but to send her to a French school, Jeanne d'Arc, and engaged an English tutor besides, so she could keep up her English. She had a real gift for languages, and advanced quickly — within ten months she could manage herself fluently in French, by which time we had to leave Tunis. It seemed a pity to let her lose the language again, so I sent her, with her mother, to London to join the French Institute, hoping she could keep up both languages there. Unfortunately the French Institute was a day school with no boarding facilities, and I had to bring my daughter back to Oslo instead. The constant upheaval of the previous two or three years — one of the real hardships of diplomatic life, and of Iranian diplomatic life especially — meant repeatedly changing schools, deeply unsettling for children and parents alike. With no English school in Oslo, her education came to something of a halt.

The goodwill and personal kindness of the headmaster of the small six-grade English school led him to open a special “Advanced Class” for children aged eleven to seventeen, taking on the burden of teaching twelve such students himself. Having failed to get her into the larger American school, I had no choice but to send her to the English school instead, where she joined the Advanced Class — and once again I engaged a private tutor for her French. After about a year, and following my own complaints to the American Ambassador over the American school's refusal to admit her, he used his influence to have the school's policy on diplomatic children reversed, and she was admitted to the American school's eighth grade. Being a sociable girl, she quickly made friends among her classmates, spending her holidays with them playing tennis, cross-country skiing, or swimming.

Summer in Oslo is very quiet, since Norwegians and diplomats alike tend to leave for the south of France or other sunnier spots. With no proper assistant to leave in charge, I could not leave my post, and so stayed in Oslo through the summer. My daughter's only real pleasure during those months was going to the swimming pool at Frogner Park.

On 13th July 1964, at about 10.30 in the morning, she came into my office to say she was going to the pool. She disliked using the official car for school or for her own errands, thinking it rather snobbish, and preferred the school bus, public transport, or her bicycle instead. It was past eleven when my telephone rang, and my private secretary told me a Mrs. Olson wished to speak with me. Mrs. Olson, the wife of an American NATO officer stationed in Oslo, was

on the line, her voice uneasy. She had been driving her own daughter to the pool to meet mine, she said, when she saw a large crowd gathered around the tramway. She got out to see what had happened, and found my daughter lying on the ground, badly bleeding, with no one making any move to call the police or an ambulance. She flagged down the first passing pickup truck and sent her to the hospital. She did not tell me my daughter's condition — only, “Go to the hospital as soon as you can.” My wife had taken the Embassy car to go shopping, so I asked my secretary to drive me there instead.

On arriving at the hospital, I found Dey on a stretcher, being taken to the operating theatre. Blood streamed from her left ear, her nose, and her mouth as she moved from side to side. I took her hand and kissed it, and asked her what had happened, and whether she could hear me — she turned toward me but said nothing. I do not know whether she could not speak, or whether she was already unconscious. Oh, what a ghastly, painful, unforgettable sight for a father! I was utterly lost — I did not know where I was, where to go, what to do, or whom to call. I was too shocked even to cry, or to speak; I simply moved about without any will of my own, like a robot. The nurses wheeled her stretcher into the lift toward the operating floor, her legs and arms still moving, her breath labouring through her blood-filled mouth. Apart from her head, which was dangerously injured, the rest of her body seemed quite sound. She was taken into the operating theatre, where Professor Dr. Christiansen, a brain surgeon of international reputation, worked over her for more than an hour. My wife arrived in the meantime, utterly beside herself; I left it to my secretary to explain to her the state in which I had found our daughter. There was nothing left for us to do but wait, and pray.

After an hour she was brought back to her room, motionless, breathing only through a machine, cleaned and bandaged. I asked the professor's opinion. He said he was not without hope, but that the damage to her brain was severe. His words only deepened our dread, though he tried, in vain, to comfort us by saying she was a strong, healthy girl who could fight through it. She was indeed strong and healthy — but the injury, and very possibly the anaesthetic itself, proved stronger still, as the professor himself came to suspect.

After twenty hours of unconsciousness — a length that worried the doctors greatly — a second operation was thought necessary, to establish the cause of her continued state. The doctors concluded afterward that the damage lay in the cerebellum. The doctor and his assistant did everything in their power to revive her. I went to her bedside again and again, massaging her hands, calling her name, trying in vain to wake her. The unconsciousness lasted more than thirty-six hours, though her heart and circulation still worked normally throughout. In time the doctor lost hope, and did his painful best to make us understand that, given the depth of her unconsciousness, there was little cause left for optimism. Finally, after three days in a coma, on the afternoon of 16th July, at about 4 PM, she was taken from us forever, and our happiness was buried with her.

What was the true cause — the damage to her cerebellum, or an overdose of anaesthetic? She had still been moving before the anaesthetic was given! No — the real cause, I believe, lies in our own misfortune: in having, at the head of the Ministry, an unknown man who was allowed to play with my career, kicking me from one country to another these past four years like a football! After forty-five years of honest service, I was treated worse than the newest recruit would ever be treated! My readers, having read this book, will understand well enough why — my sincerity to my country, and my honesty in my work, never allowed me to become a flatterer or a yes-man, nor to act against my country's true interests.

Immediately after the accident, I telegraphed my sister to ask whether any doctor more capable might save her, though Professor Christiansen was, in truth, as fine a brain surgeon as any in Europe. My sister, unfortunately, could find no one, owing to the holiday season, and instead flew to Oslo to be with my wife.

When I was in Hamburg, from 1950 to 1952, my daughter was three years old. There, I obtained from the local authorities a small plot of land in the famous Ohlsdorf Cemetery, set aside as a burial ground for Iranians — little knowing that twelve years later, I would be laying my own daughter to rest in that very ground.

The next day, 17th July, our beloved daughter's body was flown, with full honours, to Hamburg aboard a private plane. The heads of the diplomatic corps in Oslo were kind enough to come to the airport, where the flags of both countries were lowered to half-mast.

And so my final posting abroad, like my very first, ended in unforgettable tragedy — the death of my only daughter, Dey, whose name means the angel entrusted with the plan and prudence of the month of Dey, the tenth month of the Iranian solar calendar.

In Tehran, my Ministry was kind enough to issue a statement claiming that my daughter had died through her own carelessness while cycling in the street! Contrary to that bizarre kindness, the Oslo police report — which remains in my possession — found, after a thorough investigation, that the tram driver bore full responsibility for the tragedy. Strangely enough, the same driver had caused a similar accident involving a car the year before, for which he had also been found at fault, and had his licence suspended for three months.

Having studied the police report closely, I went back to the scene myself several times to watch the trams pass, and a painful doubt began to take hold in me. Was it simply carelessness, or something more? I shall never know.

If the fault had truly been my daughter's, why did the Oslo tramway company pay us 30,000 kroner in damages? I could not rid myself of the doubt that it had been more than a mere accident. I put my doubts to my lawyer and asked him to pursue the matter through the courts. He told me he had done all Norwegian law allowed. I asked, without meaning to give offence, whether I might engage a foreign lawyer instead — he explained that foreign lawyers were simply not permitted to practise in Norway. And so the man responsible escaped any real punishment, while our beloved child, and our happiness with her, was buried forever. Strangely, my report on the whole affair to the Foreign Ministry received no attention whatsoever.

That is how my forty-five years of service came to their end. Do not embarrass me, dear reader, by asking how those forty-five years were rewarded. Only remember that I served my country as a civil servant without a single weak point — save, perhaps, my own sensitivity. I sometimes wish I had learned to carry the same complexes as everyone else, rather than feel things quite so deeply. Do not tell me it is too late — I know it!

And yet I cannot say those forty-five years of honest service went entirely without reward. There was, in the end, one reward I shall never forget — and here it is!



Mother dressing her daughter's grave

So do not be surprised, dear reader, if, after all you have read here, I close these pages with the words “Javid Shah” — Long Live the Shah — for the independence and integrity of my country still rest on that ancient symbol. But if that ancient institution is to be preserved, it stands in urgent need of reform, and must be cleansed, from the inside out, of the corrupt and unprincipled elements that have gathered around it.

APPENDIX

1. The Document of Rupture of Diplomatic Relations with England

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' letter to Her Britannic Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires in Tehran

Monsieur le Chargé d'Affaires,

I have the honour to inform you of the decision of the Imperial Iranian Government to break off diplomatic relations with Her Majesty's Government. The Iranian Government much regrets that it has been compelled to adopt this decision.

In the course of the dispute with the former Oil Company, my government constantly endeavoured to prevent the dispute from impairing the friendly relations between our two governments, and is of the opinion that, had the British Government given due regard to equity and friendship, and to the purpose of the Iranian nation and government — which consisted solely in recovering their despoiled rights — the relations between our two governments would never have reached their present state.

Unfortunately, however, in this matter of vital importance to our people, your government not only failed to help bring about a settlement of the dispute, but, by giving illegal protection to the former Company, prevented the attainment of an agreement. Furthermore, certain officials of the government created difficulties, through provocation and unjustified interference, aimed at disturbing the country's peace and tranquillity.

The Imperial Government of Iran hopes that Her Britannic Majesty's Government, on coming to appreciate the true nature of the Iranian nation's movement, will revise its attitude. Should such a favourable atmosphere and mutual understanding come about, the Iranian Government, being always desirous of maintaining good relations between our two governments, will take measures, with great pleasure, to resume diplomatic relations.

In conclusion, I would inform you that the members of the Imperial Embassy in London have been instructed to leave for Tehran within a week from 22nd October 1952.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Dr. Hossein Fatemi

Minister for Foreign Affairs

2. Mossadegh's Message to the British Nation

Dear Mr. Middleton,

Now that you and your colleagues are homeward bound, and your time in Iran numbers only a few remaining days, I wish to send, through you, a message to your countrymen, in the hope that they may come to know the true facts: that throughout our campaign of these past eighteen months, the Iranian people have constantly sought to employ every means in their power to prevent any flaw from appearing in the long friendship between our two nations. It is in that hope that I set down, in summary, the developments of the past nineteen months in Iran — developments that have, I believe, been concealed from the British people by the former Company. My government has done its best throughout to find an equitable settlement of the oil dispute through amicable negotiation, so as to clear away the clouds of suspicion and pessimism that have darkened relations between our two states — clouds raised, over many years, by the covetousness of a profit-seeking company — and to open, instead, a new chapter of mutual confidence and sincerity between Iran and the United Kingdom.

The valuable time that ought to have gone toward internal reform was instead consumed by nineteen months of futile negotiation with various missions and exchanges of notes.

One result, however, has come of it: now that our diplomatic relations have, to our great regret, reached their present state, the government and people of Iran can show the world plainly that, from the very outset, they sought in good faith

to settle the oil dispute and spared no effort toward that end — while the covetous Company, secure in the knowledge that it enjoyed the full protection of the British Government for its legal claims, resorted instead to threats and philippics, and brought the dispute before international tribunals it had no competence to hear. Pursuing a policy of procrastination, calculated to let time work in its favour and prepare the ground for the collapse of the Iranian people, it deliberately caused the failure of one oil mission after another, and, through false propaganda financed from the very wealth it had taken from the Iranian poor, spread the rumour, even to the remotest corners of the world, that the government and people of Iran had no wish to reach a settlement at all.

This conduct on the part of the former Company continued, and the Government of the United Kingdom went so far in defending its fictitious and illegitimate claims that every principle of amicable relations was set aside; taking advantage of internal intrigue, and reinforced by financial pressure and unreasonable economic restrictions that should have had no place among members of the United Nations, it trampled those principles underfoot through what can only be called the economic punishment of its own reaction. The Iranian Government bore this aggression against its rights stoically, for months, without reaction.

It should hardly need pointing out, to those familiar with this affair, that the British Government established what amounted to a dictatorial regime in Iran, for the sole purpose of safeguarding its own illegitimate interests. Its second step was to impose a new agreement upon the Iranian people in 1933, through the very regime of its own creation, while invoking the original D'Arcy Concession, which had never received the sanction of the Iranian Parliament. Beyond its harmful economic effects, that imposed 1933 Agreement endangered our political integrity and independence by allowing the former Company to interfere unduly in our social and political affairs.

Over fifty years of operation in Iran, the former Company, while extracting oil that yielded revenues of hundreds of millions of pounds, never once acted as a purely commercial enterprise free of politics — on the contrary, it had a hand in every act of corruption Iran has witnessed over that half-century.

Given the wider movement toward self-determination among nations, the Iranian people could no longer tolerate the former Company's conduct, and the country's best interest demanded an immediate change — realised through the nationalisation of the oil industry throughout the land. In this, the Iranians simply exercised the birthright of any free and independent nation, a right many other countries, the United Kingdom among them, have themselves exercised in nationalising their own industries.

Notwithstanding the Iranian Government's firm conviction that it stood within its rights to nationalise the oil industry, the Government of the United Kingdom, from the outset, took measures both inside and outside Iran to protect the former Company's unlawful interests — measures contrary to the spirit of friendship between our two governments. Only after a prolonged and unlawful struggle against our national aspirations did it finally have no choice but to recognise the undeniable right of the Iranian nation to nationalise its own oil industry. The Iranians naturally expected the British Government to abide by that recognition and act accordingly. My government, for its part, did its best to take British interests into account wherever they did not contravene the Oil Nationalisation Law, and made real efforts to demonstrate its goodwill. We offered, for example, to let the former Company export any quantity of oil it wished, against receipts, the value of which would be reckoned when compensation claims were settled — a proposal the Company declined.

A second proposal, concerning the continued employment of the Company's technical staff under their existing contracts, was likewise rejected. Since the British technical staff were unwilling to work for the National Iranian Oil Company, the Iranian Government could not pay their salaries, and their dismissal was forced upon us by these very circumstances.

The British Government then transformed what should have remained a dispute between the former Company and the Iranian Government into a dispute between states, bringing before the Security Council a case that, by rights, belonged before Iranian tribunals. Disappointed there, the British Government referred the case to the International Court of Justice, but again without the result it sought — even the British member of the Court, Sir Arnold Duncan McNair, found in Iran's favour, and I take this occasion to thank him for his fairness and impartiality.

Faced with the Court's decision, the former Company then applied to it to appoint an arbitrator, and again received a negative reply.

We had hoped that, after so many unfriendly actions, the British Government would at last change its course — but, to our regret, it pursued the same policy still.

In seeking to settle these differences, the Iranian Government showed its readiness to pay compensation to the former Company in accordance with the nationalisation laws of Great Britain herself, or of any other country the Company might prefer, and, to demonstrate our utmost goodwill, refrained even from referring the matter to the Iranian tribunals — the only properly competent forum — offering instead to submit it to the International Court of Justice. This proposal, too, was rejected. Finally, the Iranian Government requested an advance payment of £20,000,000, gold-guaranteed and convertible into dollars, out of the £49,000,000 the former Company itself acknowledged, in its own published balance sheet, that it owed Iran — so that the country's mounting economic strain might be somewhat eased. This proposal, too, was rejected.

It may be worth explaining that the £20,000,000 requested formed part of Iran's rightful share of the former Company's general reserve fund, under the 1951 balance sheet and the imposed 1933 Concession Agreement. That reserve fund, according to the 1951 balance sheet, stood at £110,500,000; Iran's twenty percent share under the 1933 Agreement therefore amounted to £22,100,000, immediately due upon nationalisation of the oil industry — of which £20,000,000 was requested on account. Meanwhile, as noted above, the British Government, beyond raising other difficulties, did not hesitate to bring financial and economic pressure to bear on the Iranian people in support of the former Company's unlawful interests — preventing the sale of Iranian oil on world markets, and even refusing to release Iran's own sterling holdings in British banks.

Finally, in a note sent to me by His Excellency Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, on 15th October 1952, in reply to the Iranian Government's proposals, the true intentions of the British Government were laid bare. It became clear that the British Foreign Secretary was demanding compensation for the profits the former Company would have earned had it continued its activity in this country.

Industries are nationalised, of course, precisely to remove private profiteering, and to direct the proceeds of nationalisation to the public treasury alone. Yet the British Government's latest note made plain its intention to revive the 1933 Agreement in another form — for, rather than limiting its compensation claim to the former Company's actual properties and installations in Iran, it demanded compensation covering all the unlawful profits it supposed the Agreement would otherwise have yielded.

This latest note left no doubt, in the minds of any impartial observer, that the British Government, beyond the unfriendly measures already taken, had no wish to revise its policy in the smallest degree, and intended instead to continue a course contrary to the aspirations of both our nations.

These developments compelled the Government of Iran to sever diplomatic relations with the British Government, leaving their resumption to whatever time the British Government may choose to revise its policy — with due regard to the wider awakening of nations, to the awakening of the Iranian people, and to the principles of justice and equity.

The Iranian Government declares plainly that the sincere and friendly relations between the peoples of Iran and Great Britain shall continue to stand on their own firm foundation. For that reason, now that the last members of the British diplomatic staff are leaving the Iranian capital, no difficulty whatsoever is being placed in the way of British nationals, whether merchants or travellers.

I am confident that, should the books and records of the former Company one day be opened to the truth-loving people of Great Britain, and they be given the chance to see for themselves the interference, injustice, intrigue, and political manoeuvring the Company practised, they will not fail to admire the patience and fortitude of our people. But the dark curtain of unjust propaganda the former Company maintains, in Great Britain and elsewhere, still keeps that truth from spreading — proof once again that, even in the twentieth century, the power of money can still mock truth and justice. Our people, nonetheless, shall continue their honest struggle, until the majority of the British people arrive at the same impartial judgment reached by Sir Arnold Duncan McNair, and come to hear and read what he himself heard and read.

3. Interview with Sir Denis Wright

“Thank you for coming. What made me ask you here today was that I wished to discuss a matter that will have great bearing on the friendly relations between our two countries.”

“These past few days I have been thinking that, even should the oil question be settled entirely in my country's favour, our opponents will still look for other grounds for criticism. I therefore turned my mind to our other outstanding differences — the ones that have always fed complaint, pessimism, and distrust between our two peoples. Among them, I found one that could serve as genuinely good propaganda, showing our own people that England's approach this time is truly sincere and backed by real goodwill: our frontier dispute with Pakistan. I wonder how familiar you already are with it?”

He said, “I am not yet acquainted with the dispute, but I have been studying our relations through the books and archives I found in the Embassy library.”

“Then let me give you a short history of the matter. Under our treaties of 1812 and 1814, England undertook not to interfere in Iran's relations with Afghanistan. But after the Russo-Persian wars, which cost us the Caucasus and Trans-Caspia, the Russian frontier with Iran advanced considerably. This naturally worried Great Britain, but rather than reaching some arrangement with Iran to check further Russian encroachment, she instead tried to occupy, or bring under her own protection, regions of Iran she considered a defensive outpost for India — regions that had always formed part of Persia. The treaties of 1812 and 1814 are themselves the best evidence of Great Britain's recognition of Iran's rightful claim to these regions.”

“So it became necessary to find some pretext to justify Great Britain's interference in these regions. The Herat incident — beginning with the disloyalty of Herat's governor, backed by Kabul — served as a convenient excuse. Britain's involvement, kept very secret at first, became known once the British Minister in Tehran, contrary to the undertakings of those two treaties, took it upon himself to mediate a conflict with a far longer history than that — one you can, I am sure, trace fully through your own Embassy's archives.”

“In short, a war stirred up by that very Minister, and nearing an end favourable to Iran, took a different turn once British troops landed at Bushehr, forcing Iran not only to withdraw from Afghanistan but to abandon Herat as well — always, in truth, a part of Khorasan. Iran was compelled to sign the Treaty of Paris in 1858, and Afghanistan, as the north-western defensive outpost of India, fell thereafter under British protection.”

“Nor did matters end there. Iran's weakness after those two wars only encouraged Britain's policy of expansion through gradual penetration. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a man named Goldsmith, under the pretext of surveying an overland extension of the Indo-European telegraph line to Bushehr, entered Baluchistan. His true mission, it turned out, was to sow discord among the region's tribal chiefs — the Khan of Kalat above all — encouraging the Khan's own ambitions over much of Mokran, Kharan, and Changi. When Iran refused the Khan's claim, Goldsmith appeared as mediator, bearing a map that showed the Khan's claim as fact. When Tehran still refused, Goldsmith, backed by the Government of India, advanced with a strong military force as far as Panjgur, and sent Tehran an ultimatum: accept his note and the accompanying map, or he would advance further still. Under that duress, Nasser-ed-Din Shah issued a decree reading, in essence: 'While we recognise our own legitimate and historic rights over Baluchistan, to please the British Government we accept the note and its accompanying map.' That acceptance is what we know today as the Iran-Kalat Agreement of 1896.”

“What still shows Iran's true position on this treaty, even now, is that from that date to this we have never once joined a demarcation commission. Here, on this very map — an English one, published by the Calcutta Survey Department, an official body — you can see for yourself that no definite boundary is actually drawn.”

Mr. Wright asked, “How far does your claim extend?”

I said, “According to the documents we hold, and to what has been recorded in books written by Englishmen — such as MacKeen, secretary to Sir J. Malcolm — our claim covers the whole of Baluchistan, since before England ever reached this part of the world, we held the whole of the Iranian plateau. But today, our claim is limited to the whole of Mokran, Kharan, and Changi” — and I showed him these districts on the map.

Mr. Wright examined the map carefully and said, “These areas cover thousands of square miles. How could we possibly cut such a large piece from one country and hand it to another?”

I said, “I grant you it is a large piece — but when it was being cut from our country in the first place, no one thought to raise that objection. Beyond that, how can anyone recognise a claim to Baluchistan on behalf of a newly created country that is not even yet properly established, with no real historic connection to the region at all — indeed, when we speak with Pakistani representatives here in Tehran about Baluchistan, they scarcely know where Mokran, Kharan, or Changi even lie. I believe that if the truth were made known to the Pakistanis, and there were real goodwill on the British Government's part, Britain could suggest to Pakistan that they meet Iran's claim. That would, in turn, give the Iranian Government a genuine opportunity to make good use of it as evidence of Great Britain's goodwill — a most effective answer to our opposition's own propaganda.”

I closed our conversation with one further thought: “One thing that has always puzzled me is why England takes such pains to create artificial countries — countries indebted to her for their very independence, and yet which so often turn against her” — and I gave him several examples.

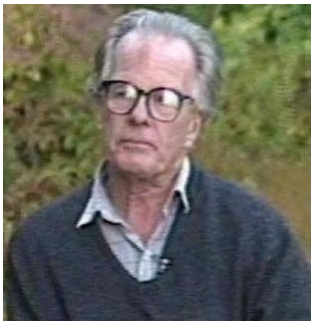
Mr. Wright, listening carefully and taking notes, referred back to my lecture at the Staff College and said, “You touched on Baluchistan in your Staff College lecture as well.”

I replied, “As you know, it is customary at our Staff Colleges for politicians, or the Staff Officers themselves, to lecture on the country's international relations, so that the students remain properly acquainted with our general foreign policy — such lectures have been given before, and will continue to be given. I do not recall whether I touched on our international relations in my very first lecture, but in the next, I could hardly avoid the truth that, thanks to Great Britain's goodwill, we have now regained part of what we once lost.”

He asked when my next lecture would take place.

I told him, “To give you time enough to let me bring your good news to my students myself, I shall delay my lecture two or three weeks — and I wish you every success in the meantime.”

Photograph



Sir Denis Wright, 1911–2005

Sir Denis Wright, 1911–2005 — author of The English Amongst the Persians (1977) and The Persians Amongst the English (1985).

4. Document of the Origin of the Meftah Family

[In the original, this document is in Persian verse and has not been translated in this draft.]

Document

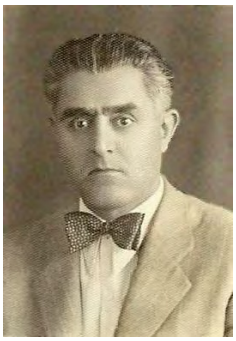


Document of the origin of the Meftah family (Persian verse)

5. His Excellency the Late Abdol Hossein Meftah, 1899–1991

Senior Iranian diplomat and Ambassador in many countries, including Tunisia, India, Holland, Germany, and Norway. Acting Foreign Minister under Mossadegh and the late General Zahedi. A great Iranian thinker, a legendary figure, politician, and patriot. May God bless his soul.

Photographs



Young A. H. Meftah

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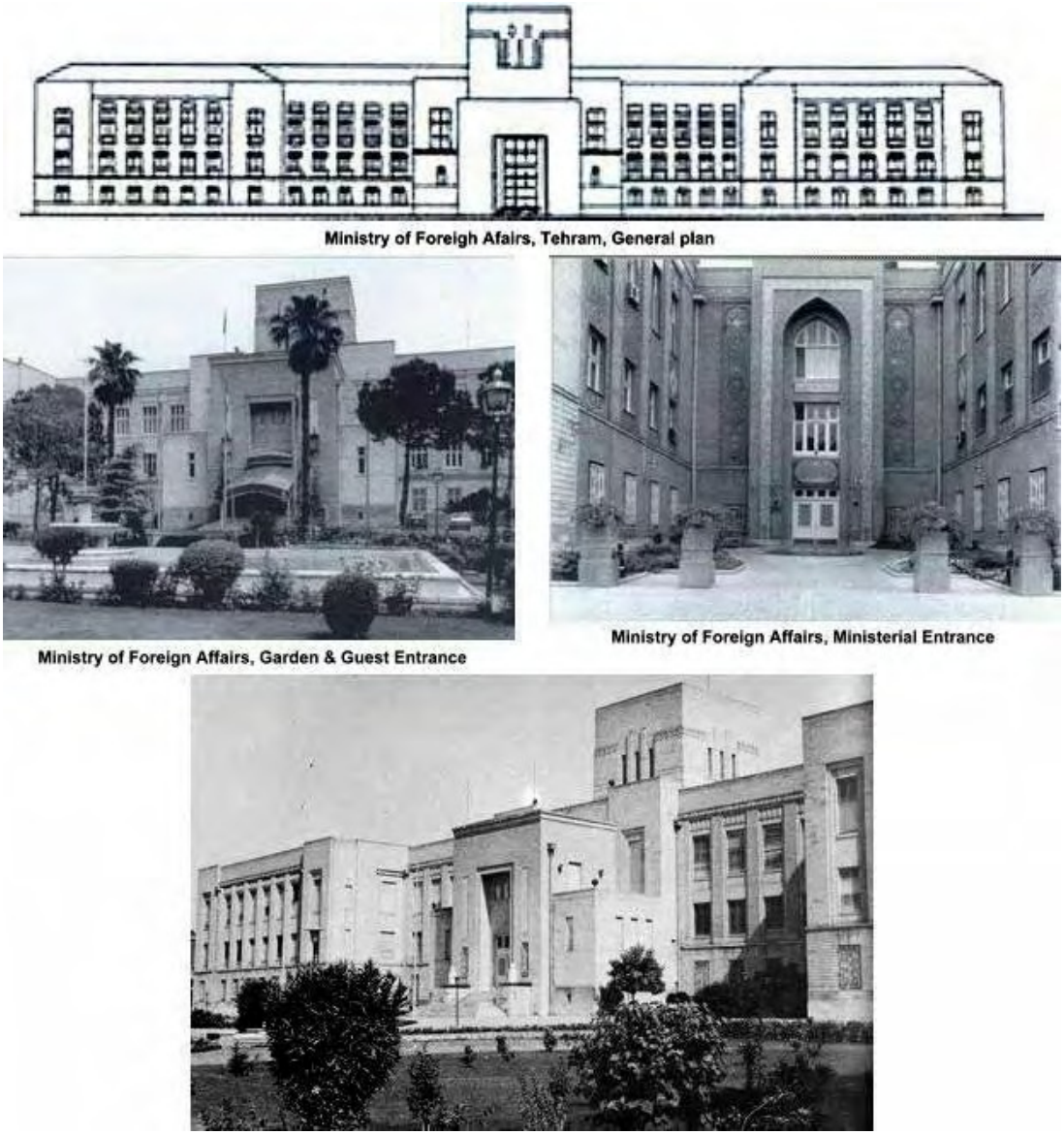

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran — general plan, garden and guest entrance, ministerial entrance, and full building