

The Canvas

Excerpt from “They Said They Wanted Revolution,” thesis in progress by
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When I decided to tell the story of my parents, I realized that it required heavy research and investigation. My father's execution, which took place on January 25, 1983, in Iran, and my mother and my own escape from that country, could not be divorced from history or politics. The story didn't have emotional resonance without this context: they were part of a group of Iranian revolutionaries radicalized at Berkeley during the height of the anti-Vietnam War era.

Since all revolutions are born out of history and politics, my research had to be expansive. And because all revolutions are personal, it also had to be focused. I had to create a chapter, early in the narrative, that gave the reader a background in Iranian and American history from 1953 into the 1970s. The excerpt, reproduced below, attempts to ground the reader, so they have a clear sense of time and place. At the same time, I had to tell a complicated history quickly as not to bore or overwhelm the reader.

Since I am neither historian nor political philosopher nor US-Iran policy expert, I had to begin my research at the beginning. I had to get my head around the entire history, so I started with secondary sources. I read great big books, including several biographies of the Iranian monarchy, histories of the CIA and America's Middle East policy and more. I tried to choose authors who were objective, as well as others with a clear points-of-view. Next I turned to academic journals and graduate dissertations. From there I went after primary sources. I scoured old newspapers, legal cases, and the national security archives. I searched archival news footage and watched documentaries. I contacted presidential libraries and university archives. I read through my mother's oral history and interviewed family members and friends. Then, to verify each account, I went back and crosschecked facts.

In the end, it was research that transformed this memoir.

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If one is to recount their story accurately, and if the retelling is to be true, the story must begin back in time, in the muck of history. The only way to understand the present, after all, is to retell everything which makes up the lives of people we've never met, places we've never seen, and times long past. As we follow time backward to some starting point, our families' stories become tangled in the great sweep of history. The machinations of state leaders, the push and pull of warring empires, the divisiveness of ideology must inevitably impact the small human lives toiling in their orbit. For the most part, human beings go on. They put their heads down and adapt to the shifting world. In short, they get on with their lives. There are others, however, who choose not to get on with it. They heave themselves against the rock face of history and demand the world and destiny take notice. 'I exist,' these small, foolhardy people scream. 'I exist and demand to have a say in the course of human history.'

For a time, there were a great many people in my family who would have aligned themselves with those foolhardy criers. In ways large and small, they ran headlong into the political and ideological hailstorm of the mid-twentieth century. But I can't tell each person's story. Their beginnings are complicated, hidden, and varied. But I have to begin someplace, so I choose July 1953. I choose to begin in Tehran, Iran's capital city.

In 1953, Tehran was a striking city, ringed by mountain peaks with lush green parks dotting the neighborhoods. The north of the city was filled with large ornate homes, gated gardens, and luxury apartment buildings owned by wealthy Iranians and Western expatriates. The very poor and the very religious lived along the city's southern edge smushed close together in squat dust-covered apartments. The long avenues that ran the length of the city acted like arteries, pumping cars, taxis, buses, and pedestrians backwards and forwards, from the majestic

northern neighborhoods to the uniform, tottering south. Tall Cyprus trees lined the streets and between the trees and the bustling thoroughfares were the *jubes*, the wide, uncovered gutters common to many cities in the developing world. When the snows began to melt, water ran down the faces of mountains, mixed with spring rains, and filled the concrete jubes until they spilled over to create fast-moving tributaries that gushed from the feet of the Alborz Mountains through south Tehran, cleaning out the northern streets and destroying the tenements in the bottom of the city. After the rains and floods, summer arrived in Tehran. During the days, the sun beat down on the crowded city, baking the inhabitants in a polluted stew of humidity and exhaust. At night, however, there was some relief. The air was warm but not uncomfortable – the perfect climate for clandestine plotting and spies moving out of shadowy doorways and down alleys.

It was during this time, on June 19, 1953, in the height of summer, that an American called James Lockridge moved to Tehran. In no time, he was adopted by the city's sparkling expatriate scene. Every afternoon, the young American with horn-rimmed glasses and an athlete's build could be found playing tennis at the courts in the Turkish Embassy. He was a relatively good tennis player. He ran hard and cracked the balls with a forceful volley. He played to win each game, set, and match. At times, however, Lockridge's ambition exceeded his talent, and he would cuss and growl. "Oh, Roosevelt!" he'd say. After a match, one of his new acquaintances asked Lockridge why he used President Roosevelt's name.

I hate Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lockridge replied good-naturedly. He went on to explain that as he was a passionate Republican, he couldn't think of a more insulting epithet to hurl at anyoneⁱ.

Of course Lockridge was lying. He was lying about his favorite swear word; he was lying about his name. Only his tennis game was real. In actuality, Lockridge was Kermit "Kim"

Roosevelt, Jr. He was President Theodore Roosevelt's grandson and a distant relation to the Democrat he claimed to hate so much. When he shouted "Oh, Roosevelt!" it was an amateur slip-up, a bit of truth revealed before being covered up with a charming lie. Kim may have been an above-average athlete, but he was a genius when it came to creating elaborate tales and telling them with complete conviction. He was a born with a penchant for self-aggrandizing and cinematic storytelling, the perfect young man to pull off America's first coup d'état: Operation Ajax.

By the time Kim Roosevelt slunk over the Turkish border into Iran, he and his cousin, Archie, were among the most influential senior covert operatives in the C.I.A.'s Middle East and North Africa unit. The Roosevelt cousins had a vision for the United States' role in the oil-rich region, which had grown out of their passionate devotion to colonial writers and diplomats like Rudyard Kipling and T.E. Lawrence. As a young man at the elite preparatory Groton School, Kim Roosevelt told his teachers a wild tale based on one of Kipling's most famous books, *Kim*, which was how Kermit Roosevelt got his nicknameⁱⁱ.

Kim and Archie were among the most influential strategists behind America's short-lived Arabist strategy for the Middle East region. Following World War II, Kim Roosevelt and like-minded Americans saw an opportunity for America to insinuate itself into the region as the Middle East and North African countries began wriggling free of British and French influence. Directly following the end of the European theater of war, Kim Roosevelt and other Arabists realized that with a weakened Great Britain and France, European colonialism would fall. It was time, Roosevelt believed, for the United States to slide into the role of Western power. The Arabists wanted the United States to wrest control from Great Britain and Europe over oil resources in the Middle East, while simultaneously ensuring the region didn't fall under the

influence of Stalin's Soviet Union. The Arabists had little regard for Israel, the newly formed Jewish state. Whether this disregard was because of genuine sympathy for displaced Palestinians, or a fundamental anti-Semitic streak, or disinterest in Middle Eastern nations without oil, or some mixture of the three, isn't entirely clear. Nonetheless, the Arabist agenda, which Roosevelt helped found and foster, believed America's future was linked to its proximity and influence over the nations in that region. From 1948 through 1951, Roosevelt helped to found and lead three Arabist U.S.-based propaganda groups: the Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land, the Holy Land Emergency Liaison Program, and, in 1951, American Friends of the Middle East.

The Arabist plan for making America the dominant force in the Middle East began in earnest in 1951 with two elections: Winston Churchill's reelection as prime minister of the United Kingdom and Mohammad Mossadegh's election as prime minister of Iran. The seeds, however, had been planted in 1933, the year when Great Britain's Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, an antecedent of the oil company later called British Petroleum or BP, signed a treaty with Iran to have access to Iran's oil and enjoy the profits from its sale. The agreement, signed by the shah of Iran, gave the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, a British state-owned company, control over Iran's oil reserves from 1933 through 1993, 60 years in the future.

Nearly two decades after the agreement was signed, in March 1951, the Iranian legislature reneged on the agreement and voted to nationalize the country's oil, thereby taking control from Great Britain. The next month, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh was chosen by parliament to be Iran's next prime minister. He was an enormously popular parliamentarian and one of the founders of the National Front Party, a coalition party with a platform focused on nationalizing the nation's oil revenues. After his election, Mossadegh began to implement a series of

progressive labor laws that would weaken Iran's monarchy and strengthen his signature plan to nationalize Iranian oil.

On May 1, 1951, less than one month after taking office, Mossadegh announced the complete nationalization of the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. He also announced the cancellation of all oil concessions to Great Britain and ordered his government to take over the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's property in Iran. He explained his policy this way: No nation could ever be truly independent without economic freedom. According to Mossadegh, Iran would never be able to tackle major social issues, like poverty, justice, health, and education, without also gaining complete independent control over the country's own natural resources. Mossadegh insisted that since a British oil company was afforded a 60-year claim to Iran's oil and oil profits, Iran didn't have control over its own future, nor would she until all foreign influence had been wiped from her oil fields.

Great Britain balked. On May 26, 1951, the British took Iran to the newly formed International Court of Justice to demand Iran honor the 1933 agreement. As the case made its way through the ICJ, the United States, which had remained neutral, stepped into the fray. President Harry S. Truman's administration attempted to broker a deal between the two nations whereby Britain accepted nationalized Iranian oil, while Iran allowed Great Britain control over drilling and production. The lead negotiator for Great Britain said he'd be willing to "accept the façade of nationalization" as long as the AIOC retained control over the oil industry in practice. The Americans, meanwhile, doubted that the British had a compelling legal argument beyond claiming breach of contract. The State Department summarized the legal dilemma this way: "no government could deny itself sovereign rights to nationalize an industry within its territory." In a diplomatic missive, which was accidentally sent to both Great Britain and Iran, the Truman

administration urged Britain to accept nationalization and negotiate with their former ally. Ill-fated negotiations, political machinations, even assassinations, continued throughout most of 1951. By autumn of that year, a frustrated Truman administration was increasingly concerned that the dispute would push Iran into the arms of the Soviet Union. On the British side, some in government were strongly advocating for an invasion of Iran. They argued that a show of force was the only way to make the Middle Eastern nation kneel to British interests. Great Britain went so far as to move troops to the Iraq-Iran border. Soon, however, any plans for invasion were scrapped in favor of threats. The British swore they would remove all their petroleum experts from Iran. Mossadegh, in turn, halted all negotiations with the United Kingdom and the AIOC. He announced that all foreign oil experts had 24 hours to leave the country. By autumn 1952, the animosity between the two countries had reached its zenith—the British appealed to the United Nations Security Council but failed to gain traction, while the Mossadegh-led negotiators rejected all British efforts to remain involved in Iran's oil industry.

The British responded by implementing a boycott of all Iranian petroleum and doubling oil production in Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Within a matter of months, the Iranian people began to feel the economic sting. Mossadegh's general popularity sank in proportion to Iran's rising economic struggles. What's more, the Iranian prime minister declared Great Britain to be Iran's enemy and halted all diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In November 1952, the United States voted in a new Republican president, war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower. The Eisenhower administration's strategy was to implement a policy of Cold War containment. Compared to the Truman administration, this new administration was far more receptive to British calls for assistance with the Iran problem. The British quickly realized that the Eisenhower administration was susceptible to the suggestion that however much the

Iranian prime minister was personally anti-communist, his political coalition was overly reliant on Iran's communist party, the Tudeh Party. Therefore, Iran was dangerously vulnerable to Soviet influence. The Eisenhower administration realized that Iran—oil rich, strategically located, and politically vulnerable—was a perfect test for its containment policy. At the same time, the Central Intelligence Agency hadn't quite reached its official fifth birthday and was eager to prove its worth on the world stage. In all, the British had picked the perfect political moment to lean on the Americans. They finally had an administration ready to listen and a new clandestine intelligence agency eager to act. By March 1953, less than three months after President Eisenhower took office, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles approved plans for Mossadegh's ouster. One month later, CIA director Allen Dulles, John Foster Dulles' brother, earmarked \$1 million to "to be used in any way that would bring about the fall of Mossadegh."

That brought Kim Roosevelt tiptoeing into Iran's capital in July 1953 to begin laying the ground work for the coup d'état. Soon after, President Eisenhower officially signed onto Operation Ajax.

By July 1953, Roosevelt had settled into his downtown Tehran apartment. MI6, the British intelligence agency, covered his rent. He had begun his regular afternoon tennis matches at the embassy. Off the court, Kim was working his contacts to insinuate sectarianism and chaos in Iran's political theater. The CIA's initial plan was to replace Mossadegh with General Fazlollah Zahedi, a man loyal to the then-exiled monarch, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, by essentially firing the sitting prime minister.

From the moment Roosevelt and other British and American spies began infiltrating Iranian society, from workers to the very highest echelons, the foreign agents used their

substantial budget to bribe members of the parliament, the military, the editors and publishers of newspapers, and influential religious leaders. Roosevelt then began to exploit the political schisms in Mossadegh's coalition government while his team of paid strongmen insisted that the Mossadegh government was becoming an oppressive despotic regime already cracking down on popular dissent.

The CIA's coup was scheduled for August 15, 1953. One of the prime minister's officers was to arrive at the prime minister's house at midnight with an order firing Mossadegh that was signed by the shah, Mohammad Reza Shah. The shah of Iran, who had been exiled to Rome earlier that year, had been secreted back to Iran just days before, courtesy of the CIA. Once Mossadegh was removed, the Agency planned to install a new premier and return the shah to his throne. All they needed was for the monarch to sign the order unseating Mossadegh.

The CIA and MI6 expected Mossadegh to resist the order, since Iran was, after all, a parliamentary democracy and the shah didn't actually have the power to fire his country's premier. So once he resisted, the prime minister's officer would arrest him and the CIA would quickly instate General Zahedi to take Mossadegh's place. The shah would be back on the throne the next day. Moving quickly, and taking Mossadegh by surprise, was essential.

The monarch, however, was nervous. He believed that if the coup failed, he'd lose his throne forever. Much to the annoyance of British and America intelligence officials, the monarch took time to sign off on the action. At the moment when everything was in place and all that was left to do was to act, the shah hesitated. This brief pause gave Mossadegh's allies enough time to warn the premier. By the time the officer came with the papers that would oust the prime minister, Mossadegh had slipped into the shadows and escaped.

The CIA immediately declared failure and Operation Ajax finished. They ordered Roosevelt out of the country. But Kim Roosevelt says he didn't listen. He considered himself a modern Lawrence of Arabia or Rudyard Kipling hero; they wouldn't kowtow to fate. He insisted he could still pull off a successful coup. Armed with a great deal of American dollars and British pounds, Roosevelt began to set the stage for a second coup attempt. He re-upped bribery efforts by paying hundreds of poor, disgruntled Iranians to flood the Tehran streets and chant communist slogans against the government. Next, he paid the police and military to join the melee. Chaos erupted. After several days of demonstrations, the standoff ended in a gun fight in front of the prime minister's house. Mossadegh, who wasn't a young or particularly healthy man, had returned to his home after the first coup attempt and now fled by scaling the back wall of his garden. He spent the next day in hiding before he was eventually found and arrested. One hundred people died in the orchestrated skirmish. Roosevelt's ally in the coup and its staging, General Zahedi, was quickly appointed as the new prime minister.

Meanwhile, after the August 15 coup attempt failed, the shah cut his losses and returned to exile. The monarch was sitting at a restaurant in Rome when he heard the news: the coup had worked and Mossadegh was out.

Within days of taking office, Zahedi undid all Mossadegh's policies. He restored the shah to power and entered into an agreement with the United States and Great Britain, which gave the two countries majority control over Iranian oil reserves. In exchange for securing control over Iran's petroleum, the British dropped the Iranian oil boycott, although they were never able to regain the level of influence they formerly had. The United States, on the other hand, had more influence in Iran than it, or any other Western power, had ever had. In exchange for the steady stream of oil profits, the United States government started to flood the shah's government with

American tax dollars. The shah's regime enjoyed a five-million dollar injection in the weeks immediately following the coup. Over the next few years, the U.S. government also began to train thousands of Iranian soldiers. The U.S. provided weapons, as well as CIA funds and expertise to train and assist the shah's new secret police, the SAVAK.

Students, Go West

In the mid-twentieth century, non-European students who came to the United States to get a college or graduate degree were meant to return to their home countries with concrete technical skills and an appreciation for the American way of life. These international students were to return evangelizing American economics and our political system, while ignoring certain unpleasant domestic policies, especially in the Jim Crow south. As the historian Paul Kramer, an associate professor at Vanderbilt University, says, on their return to their home countries, these students were to apply American economic and political philosophy to “‘their own societies’ politics, economics and culture.” This was especially true at the height of America’s communist containment efforts and various Cold War strategies. During this period, the United States relied on a steady stream of young foreign student migrants to be advocates for the nation’s policies towards whatever country they had hailed from. Upon graduation these students would be newly minted advocates, defacto diplomats, for U.S. foreign interests and American culture. Indeed, Kramer argues, foreign student migration is critical to understanding U.S. international history and foreign policy. “The history of foreign student migration ought to be explored as U.S. international history,” Kramer writes, “That is, as related to the question of U.S. power in its transnational and global extensions.... [H]istorians of U.S. foreign relations might profitably study international students and, in the process, bring to the fore intersections between ‘student exchange’ and ‘geopolitics.’”

In this context, it is difficult to overstate the impact that Iranian students, who arrived in the United States in the 1950s, the 1960s, and 1970s, had on American, Iranian, and Middle Eastern relations. Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of Iranian student migration to the United States and Europe between 1959 and 1979 was that the students organized the most

influential transnational political opposition movement in modern history. The historian Matthew Shannon, a professor at Emory and Henry College, explains: “[T]he Iranian student movement embodied in unique ways the global sixties. Because of the shah’s oppressive rule, the movement largely existed extra-territorially, or transnationally. Anti-shah protests were the product of diligent and efficient transnational organizing, making the Iranian student movement a global phenomenon, rather than one constituent part of worldwide student unrest of the late 1960s.” The Iranian student activists courted and discovered a natural affinity with the New Leftists of the United States and Europe. At the same time, these activists perpetuated the image of Iran’s Pahlavi monarch as a corrupt American puppet inextricably tied up with the United States and U.S. global interests. “Iranian students challenged from the ground the relationship that American and Iranian leaders forged at the highest levels of power,” Shannon writes. He continues, “Iranian students abroad were unofficial ambassadors who petitioned U.S. officials, protested at strategically selected times and locations, and forged momentary internationalist bonds with New Leftists in the United States and Western Europe.” What’s more, these students aligned their cause with the global struggles for colonial independence, the revolutions from Cuba to Vietnam, and the radical groups in the United States, like the Students for a Democratic Society and the Black Panther movement.

International sympathies aside, the main goal of the international Iranian student movement was steadfast: to “delegitimize” the shah and his government by revealing the corrupt nature of the monarchy while exposing the government’s relationship with United States. The students also lobbied U.S. lawmakers to withdraw support for the Iranian government and called on American citizens to follow suit. In other words, an active and vocal contingent of the many thousand Iranian students who came to America for university rejected a major pillar of U.S.

Cold War policy en masse. Or rather, this group of students combined the political lessons they learned while studying in the States with Iran's own culture of political agitation and struggle to create a potent, effective movement. Almost the moment the 1953 coup succeeded, Iranian students began to organize against the newly reinstated Mohammad Reza Shah and his government. During this time, scores of Iranians headed to the United States for their education. With arrival of this group, the Iranian Student Association of the United States was founded and the march towards revolution began.

In 1951, the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) was founded. Their stated mission was to bring "a better understanding of the religious, cultural, and social aspirations of people in the other parts of the world," specifically "the peoples of the Middle East." At their founding, the AFME was an "educational and cultural" organization with a staunchly pro-Arab and anti-Zionist philosophyⁱⁱⁱ. From the beginning, the AFME had close ties, both financially and through its personnel, to the Central Intelligence Agency. Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt, Jr., who nicknamed himself for his love of the Rudyard Kipling hero with that name, was one of the founders of the organization. Roosevelt, the CIA operative who oversaw the 1953 coup d'état that ousted the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstated Mohammed Reza Pahlavi as the shah of Iran, skulked over the border of Iraq into Iran on July 19, 1953. On August 12, 1953, the day before the shah signed the orders for the coup, AFME's Charles R. Hulac, Jr., a former Presbyterian minister with ties to Iran and the director of admissions and international students at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, arrived in Tehran to open the organization's office in that country. One week later, on August 19, 1953, the CIA coup was successfully carried out. The shah returned to the throne, this time with strong American support. The AFME's Iran office

began its work in earnest. The group's third annual report records this entry into Iran with some excitement.

Charles R. Hulac arrived in Teheran on August 12, 1953, to establish an office and develop an Orientation Program for Iranian students who plan to study in the United States. By the end of October he was settled into a house large enough to accommodate his family and to provide space for the office. The program is now recognized by the [United States Information Service] U.S.I.S., the bi-national center, the U.S. Overseas Mission for Iran, and the Iranian Ministry of Education as the organization in Teheran best equipped to handle the large group of students desiring advice and assistance in securing admission to American colleges and universities.

The report goes on to boast that between August 1953 and June 1954, the organization assisted 466 students with translating their school records and helped 73 students immigrate to the United States. The group also claimed that it was "able to secure admission for 140 students who plan to enter American Colleges in June or September 1954." Most impressive for the CIA-backed group was the collection of "2,569 signatures" to the office visitors log from January to June 1954, "giving an idea of the volume of visitors to the office during past five and a half months."

What the report neglects to mention is that in the months following the coup, political parties were declared illegal in Iran. Into the political void came the Iranian university students, who were identified with Leftist politics; later on the Islamist clerics and religious students would join secular students to oppose the shah's U.S.-backed regime. As the students poured onto the streets to demonstrate against the shah and the government's relationship with the West, the ousted Prime Minister Mossadegh and his inner circle were preparing for a long trial in which they had to defend themselves against charges of treason. On December 7, 1953, with the trial underway, Vice President Richard Nixon came to Tehran from Pakistan for a "three-day fact-finding visit." On his first day in Iran, the Associated Press reported that "[t]housands of

Iranians gave Nixon what American officials described as an unusually warm reception.” In addition, the AP claimed that the “communist protests”—a euphemism for the Iranian student demonstrations—did not materialize as had been expected. The report goes on to say that Premier Fazolleh Zahedi had taken “extraordinary precautions” to ensure the vice president’s visit occurred without incident. These measures included “miles of streets with soldiers and police stationed 100 feet apart.” However, even as the streets of Tehran remained “heavily patrolled” and thousands of Iranians stood in the cold cheering Nixon and wearing an expression of “friendship in their faces,” a different scene was unfolding close by. Iranian students at the University of Tehran were marching against Nixon’s visit and the return of the British to Iran. According to a UPI report, “Gen. Farhad Dadsetan, Tehran’s military governor, said most of the demonstrators at the university were Communists who refused to attend classes today and then tried to ‘demonstrate against government policies.’” Dadsetan said that soldiers were sent into the crowd to disperse the students, but when the students tried to “disarm the soldiers, the troops fired on them.” Other reports claimed that the students were “grouped around a staircase where one student was trying to make a speech” when the soldiers fired into the crowd, killing three young men who were students at the engineering school. Thirty demonstrators were arrested.

Several weeks after the students were killed, on December 22, 1953, Mossadegh was tried by a five-man military tribunal found guilty of treason. The former premier “received three years in solitary confinement...following his conviction on charges of attempting to overthrow the government, disobeying an order from Shah [Mohammad Reza] Pahlavi, to relinquish his premiership and unconstitutionally dissolving parliament.” Students, anti-shah activists, and Mossadegh’s supporters protested the premier’s sentence. Iranian troops with tommy guns were sent into the crowds to break up the demonstrations. The soldiers arrested twenty demonstrators.

The UPI newswire described the twenty as “protest marchers [and] law students from the Communist-dominated Tehran University.” Following these incidents, the Iranian student movement in Iran was effectively silenced and driven underground.

In the meantime, two weeks after the August 19 coup, on the first week of September 1953, the AFME brought together a group of eighty-five Iranian students for their first national meeting at University of Denver in Colorado. The atmosphere was tense due to the political turmoil in Iran. According to the AFME’s report to their board of directors, the Iranian students met “in the midst of Iran’s then political crisis, the students successfully, although with some difficulty, restrained their own political biases and went on to achieve their goals.” These goals, according to the report, included “the study of non-political problems in Iran (in agriculture, industry, education, society and Irano-American understanding)” and the establishment of a student newspaper, *Daneshjoo*. The group also organized a “nation-wide association” of Iranian students studying in the United States, which was called the Iranian Student Association of the United States (ISAUS).

Initially, the ISAUS was an inclusive national organization for Iranians students, regardless of their political affiliation. It served as “the foundation for Iranian student organizing in the United States, and it provided a host of services.” It gave members, young Iranians far away from home, a ready-made community and a sense of camaraderie. Most importantly, according to Shannon, this “first generation of the ISAUS members established networks of communication and created a political culture within the organization that encouraged opposition to the Pahlavi regime.” Using financial and organizational support the AFME provided, the ISAUS created and maintained relationships between the regional chapters of the ISAUS that had popped up across the United States. In fact, the AFME’s fifth annual report, covering the

fiscal years 1955 and 1956, showed a conscious effort on the part of ISAUS leadership to increase communication between the regional chapters. According to the report, “The Board of Directors of the Association was active during the year promoting not only individual memberships, but especially affiliation memberships among the local Iranian student groups throughout this country.” At the same time, the ISAUS stayed active on campuses as the cultural nexus for the young Iranian community. The group threw parties for Nowruz (the Persian New Year) and put on exhibits of Iranian art and handicrafts.

Then, in 1957, the government of Iran with the assistance of the CIA and the Israeli Mossad, established the SAVAK, the shah’s clandestine security force. The security force earned a reputation for singling out opposition groups and harassing, torturing, and executing anyone who opposed the shah’s regime. By the end of the 1950s, SAVAK agents were deployed overseas to monitor the Iranian expatriate communities, including the student groups in the United States and Europe, a practice that would continue with the support of the host countries until the end of the 1970s.

In the meantime, by the end of the following year, 1958, the relationship between the AFME and the ISAUS had soured. For close readers of the AFME’s annual reports, the tone describing the student association had become increasingly clipped. In contrast to the first giddy mention of the ISAUS in the Third Annual report (1953-1954), the Sixth Annual report (1957-1958) stayed focused on the shah’s June 1958 visit to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the AFME and the ISAUS jointly hosted a banquet for the monarch. The groups are mentioned as separate entities in the AFME report, as well as in press clips about the event. In addition, the AFME report of the evening is a dry summation of the occasion: “Approximately 140 students registered for the meeting. His Majesty spent the day with the students and in the evening

addressed a banquet given in his honor.” The June 28, 1958 Associated Press report, on the other hand, gives a little more color. The wire service reports that the Shah said to the gathered students that “with the help of American know-how and Iranian money, Iran will have almost 100 million dollars invested in industry in the next two years.” According to the same article, the shah’s message to the estimated 2,500 Iranian students studying in the United States was that they should “[c]ome back to Iran when you are through receiving your education...There will be work for you to do and we’d rather hire you than people from a foreign country.”

The tone of the following AFME annual report (1958-1959) is decidedly exasperated, even angry.

It became apparent during the year that this group faces many organizational difficulties. The large number of Iranian students in the United States presents a problem in this regard, but a tendency by the Association's officers to disregard the views of the majority of Iranian students seriously weakened its effectiveness. At the end of the year, rival Iranian student organizations emerged; however, it remains to be seen whether any of these organizations can develop into a cohesive and generally effective association.

In fact, no “rival Iranian student organization” had emerged, but depending on which source you believe, either the ISAUS split from the AFME, or the AFME became fed up with the students’ anti-shah politics. It was, after all, the AFME’s department of student affairs that received the majority of the organization’s CIA funds and used those funds to sponsor groups like the ISAUS. The AFME’s department of student affairs didn’t simply help Iranian students come to the United States to study; they also tried to influence the politics of the student associations. According to *Ramparts Magazine*’s April 1967 special report, the ISAUS regularly received thousands of dollars every year from the AFME to fund the group’s cultural activities and their annual convention. However, once the “political complexion of the student organization changed

to one of opposition to the dictatorial regime of the shah of Iran, the AFME immediately cut off support.”

Shannon, however, writes that the split was initiated by the ISAUS. Shannon believes it all came down to frustration with the increased interference from the United States government in the student group’s political affairs. Since the funding stream from the CIA to the AFME increased during this period, perhaps the expectations for effective meddling in the student group’s affair increased as well. Shannon explains that “CIA manipulated student programs and organizations to create conduits through which it could promote pro-American sentiment among youth of the world.” In this case, however, the government’s meddling backfired. When ISAUS members Ali Mohammad Fatemi and Sadeq Qotbezadeh, both of whom were fierce critics and opponents of the shah’s regime, assumed leadership of the association, they decided that it was in the best interest of the association to cut ties from the CIA-funded group.

Nevertheless, until at least 1963, representatives from the AFME would attend the ISAUS’ annual convention to encourage the group to become more sympathetic to U.S. government’s relationship towards Iran or else to get a commitment from the ISAUS that it would be an apolitical student group. *Ramparts* quotes a former president of the ISAUS, Hamid Lebastchi, describe a 1963 conversation with Earl Bunting who was the then-chairman of the AFME. Lebastchi asked Bunting if the AFME would donate funds for non-political activities, “such as publishing a directory of Iranian students in the U.S. Bunting asked whether the student group had changed its anti-shah position. Lebastchi said no. ‘In that case,’ said Bunting, ‘I’m sorry, we cannot help you.’”

Meanwhile, as the ISAUS was breaking away from the AFME, another organization was taking shape in Europe. In April 1960, Iranian students studying in Germany, France, and

England came together in Heidelberg and formed the Confederation of Iranian Students in Europe (CIS). Two years later, in 1962, the CIS, the ISAUS, and the student organizations at Tehran University combined to form the Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union (CISNU), affectionately referred to among its members as the Confederation.

The Confederation was an international, or more precisely a transnational organization, with branches throughout the United States, Europe, and Iran. In the organization's early constitution, it described itself as "the corporate and political representative of Persian students at home and abroad, within the local framework of the Persian constitution." As the group became more politically radical, however, the focus shifted from representing Iranian students generally, to being an organization of members closely aligned with radical New Leftist groups.

From the beginning, the CISNU was made up of national chapters, which were in turn made up of local or regional chapters. The United States chapter retained the name the Iranian Student Association. At each level, the structure of the organization (local, national, and international) was the same. Each level was made up of five separate committees in charge of publications, public relations, defense, finance, and cultural affairs. When someone joined a local branch of the ISAUS, she would have to choose one committee to belong to. Once she became a committee member, she voted for a member of the group to represent the committee at the local secretariat. The local secretariat was a five-member governing body in charge of the local chapters of the ISAUS. The chapter would vote for delegates to send to the regional branch of the ISAUS. These national regional representatives would then elect five members to represent them at the national level. The representatives at the national level would elect five members from their ranks to be the general secretariat. The general secretariat would then chose a

representative to represent the entire national chapter in the governing council, the international decision-making body.

When the CISNU was formed, the group was and remained financially independent and self-sufficient at the local, regional, national and international levels. According to historian Afshin Matin-Asgari, the CISNU was “financed by dues and contributions from members and supporters, sale of its various publications, and funds raised at such special events as Nowruz celebrations.”

While the CISNU was beginning to take shape, Iran was undergoing a political sea change during the early 1960s, spurred by the election of John F. Kennedy as president of the United States. During his years as a United States senator, Kennedy had urged developing countries to modernize and to modernize quickly. Once he took office, the Kennedy administration pushed the nations that relied on American aid money to do just that. Very quickly the shah began to feel pressure to implement significant modernization efforts, including a major land reform program. At the same time, Iran was in the midst of an economic downturn largely due to the mismanagement of funds by the crown. The country had blown through its oil wealth and American aid dollars. By 1961, oil-rich Iran was the beneficiary of the International Monetary Fund stabilization program and dealing with a resulting economic recession. In addition, the shah was under pressure from the Soviets salivating at the country’s border, patiently looking on as the monarch on the Peacock Throne become increasingly unpopular among his subjects.

In January 1963, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the shah introduced a package of legislative reforms, which included:

[N]ationalization of forests and pasture lands, profit sharing for workers, the privatization of state factories, reform of the electoral laws that gave greater representation to workers and farmers, and the foundation for the Literary Corps, whereby the government

would arrange for recent college graduates to travel around to the country side teaching reading and writing to the peasantry. The measures were collectively called the “Revolution of the Shah and the People,” which came to be known as the White Revolution....

The program included a land distribution element, which would redistribute land from the wealthy landowners to the working and peasant classes. The reform package was put to a referendum vote and received a highly suspect 99.9 percent affirmative vote. Nonetheless, the Kennedy administration was happy with the shah’s efforts and sent a congratulatory telegram. The majority of peasants and workers were pleased with the measures, as were most women, who were finally given the right to vote and benefited from several programs.

On the other side, many of the wealthy landowners were furious, as were most of the religious clerics, including the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who like many of the clerics was among Iran’s largest landowners. Khomeini was concerned that, apart from snatching away his wealth, the new reforms signaled an age of secularism in the country. He became an outspoken and fiery opponent of the White Revolution, as well as a popular, charismatic, and newly politicized public figure. Khomeini regularly spoke out against the shah and the legislative reforms; when he did, he equated modernization and reform with a specific kind of cultural corruption. Through the shah’s leadership, Khomeini said, Iran was once again under the thumb of a Western imperialist power. In this case, however, it wasn’t the English and the Russians; the evil influence was America, and to a lesser extent and for largely anti-Semitic reasons, Israel. From 1962 into the first few months of 1963, Khomeini relentlessly and ferociously attacked the shah from his pulpit. He told his theological students that the White Revolution was a direct assault on Islam and a pious way of life. “We must be sacrificed to the evil intentions of foreigners,” Khomeini said.

The religious students, many of whom devoted to the radical cleric, began to organize frequent protests against the shah. The shah responded to both Khomeini and the protesters with complete disdain. He told the military brass that the religious protesters were “numb and dispirited snakes and lice who float in their own dirt. If these vile and sordid elements with their reactionary friends do not awake from their sleep of ignorance, the fist of justice, like thunder will...terminate their filthy and shameful life.” On March 22, 1963, the shah made good on his promise. Soldiers dressed in plain clothes stormed a top theological school in Qom, a holy town close to Tehran. The troops tore through the building, allegedly pushing students off balconies, destroying furniture, literature, and setting alight piles of turbans and robes.

Khomeini was delighted with the shah’s actions; he believed that by sending in troops, the shah and his government had revealed their true nature. Several months later, on June 3, 1963, Khomeini gave another angry sermon against the monarch calling him a “wretched, miserable man” and accused him of being Jewish, of being against Islam and of being against Iran’s religious class. On June 5, 1963, SAVAK forces arrested Khomeini. Once news of the arrest spread, people descended on the police station in protest. The police fired into the crowd, killing twenty-eight. In Tehran, 2,000 young people congregated at the large, crowded bazaar in southern Tehran. The demonstrations turned into riots and the riots spread across the country.

For several days, the protesters, many of whom were religious and secular students, clashed with police. Eventually, the Shah’s forces wrested control from the dissenters. Khomeini spent the following eight months under house arrest before he was exiled to Turkey. From Turkey, Khomeini traveled to the Shiite holy city of Najaf, Iraq, where he continued to work and preach against the shah. While in Najaf, the cleric and his circle made their first contact with the Iranian student groups in the United States and Europe.

The 1963 riots effectively stopped large, organized dissent against the shah inside Iran. As a result, the Iranian student movement outside of Iran became the main voice of organized opposition from 1963 through the 1970s. Inside Iran, the opposition was driven underground, and militant guerrilla groups began to emerge. Eventually these groups were able to form connections with groups in Europe and the United States.

Before the mid-1960s, and unlike the opposition student groups within Iran, the Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union, enjoyed a great deal of political diversity among its members. In the U.S. chapters, many students aligned themselves with the Jebleh Melli, or the National Front, the political party originally founded by former Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. The party was outlawed in Iran after Mossadegh's arrest and trial, although it re-formed briefly in the early 1960s and adopted the slogan, "Reform, yes. Dictatorship, no." Of the many political groups represented in the CISNU and the ISAUS, the National Front was the most inclusive and popular. Indeed, in 1962, Khomeini threw his support behind the re-formed National Front.

Other groups represented in the early to mid-1960s among the ISAUS included the Nahzat-e azadi-e Iran, or the Chehbeh Azadi, which roughly translates as The Iran Liberation Movement. Members of the ISAUS were also affiliated with the Organization of Iranian Muslim Students and the Tudeh Party. The Tudeh Party was Iran's Communist Party, which was established early in the 20th century and subsequently outlawed. The student members of the Tudeh were sympathetic to the Soviets and supportive of the Bolshevik model for revolution.

In the broadest sense, these political groups were represented across all chapters of the ISAUS, but there were variations between regional chapters. The chapters on the coasts of the country (California, New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago) tended to gain members who

were politically to the left, while members of the ISAUS chapters in the middle of the country tended to be more religious and traditional in their political affiliations.

As the northern California branch of the ISAUS, headquartered in Berkeley, was the most active region in the ISAUS and one of the most influential chapters in the CISNU, its political journey to the far left parallels the entire Confederation's journey from the latter-half of the 1960s into the early 1970s.

By the middle of the 1960s, members of the Tudeh Party, affiliated with the northern California region, had splintered to form several smaller groups. These were Sazman Engelabi-e Hezbeh Tudeh, or the Organization for Revolution of the Tudehs; the Khat-e Rast, or the Right Line; and Sazman-e Marxist-Leninist-e Tufan, or the Storm: The Organization of Marxist-Leninists. Members of the Tudeh party who did not move into one of these splinter groups either left the ISAUS or else they were pushed out of the association. The ideological backbone of these splinter groups remained with the Soviet revolutionaries. At the same time, several new political groups were also established. These grew out of Maoist political philosophy and were inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution. These groups were the Etehadi-eh Communista, or the Union of Communists; and the Cadre, which had split from the Sazman-e Engelabi-e because the members' ideology evolved towards Maoist philosophy. Finally, two other groups, the Bakhtar Emrooz and the Paykar, were sympathetic to the Cuban model of revolutionary communism.

During the fourth congress of the CISNU, which met in Cologne on January 3 through 7, 1965, the confederation clearly articulated its shift from reform towards a revolution. During the congress, members voiced their support for revolutionary regimes around the world, including in Cuba and Vietnam. They decried American imperialism and criticized the Soviet Union for that

nation's support of the Shah. By the end of 1969, the National Front, the Islamists, and most of the apolitical members had left the ISAUS. The group had grown more radical over the decade, so that by 1970, the ISAUS leadership in Berkeley and across the country was affiliated with one of the many revolutionary Maoist groups. Eventually, the power grab between the Maoist groups themselves led to further friction between members.

All of this political promiscuity was happening in secret, which created more complications. The clandestine culture was in part due to the Confederation's democratic structure and its public mission to bring Iranian culture and community to various areas in the world. In other words, at least in public, the group's main mission wasn't supposed to be political but cultural.

But the secrecy also had a more practical reason: the political factions were trying to protect their members from SAVAK agents posing as students. The shah's secret police force was active in the U.S. and worked with the CIA to gather information on and intimidate Iranian students suspected of political activity. According to a wire story, published on December 17, 1970, the "[SAVAK's] main target these days is Iranian students abroad and their friends and supporters in Iran—all of whom are officially described as Communists or anarchists, 'a bunch of adventurers who like to make noise in foreign countries for their own sake.'" By the end of the 1960s, several of the most active members of the ISAUS had renewal of their Iranian passports denied. By 1970, the Shah declared membership in the ISAUS illegal.

As a result, the many political factions who were jockeying for power and new recruits were both working in secret and trying to keep their rosters secret. These groups tried to keep to the operational structure of the ISAUS and the CISNU. In theory, no one but the other members of a particular political faction knew who their comrades were, but in practice membership

among the different groups could be deduced by the company a person kept. After 1969, and particularly following the Shah's 1970 decree that membership in the ISAUS was illegal, students began to hide their faces at protests and demonstrations. Eventually, protesters decided that low-brimmed hats and large sunglasses weren't enough to protect them, and they began to wear large masks that completely obscured their faces. The masks were different colors and had different slogans printed on them that correlated with specific political factions.

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