

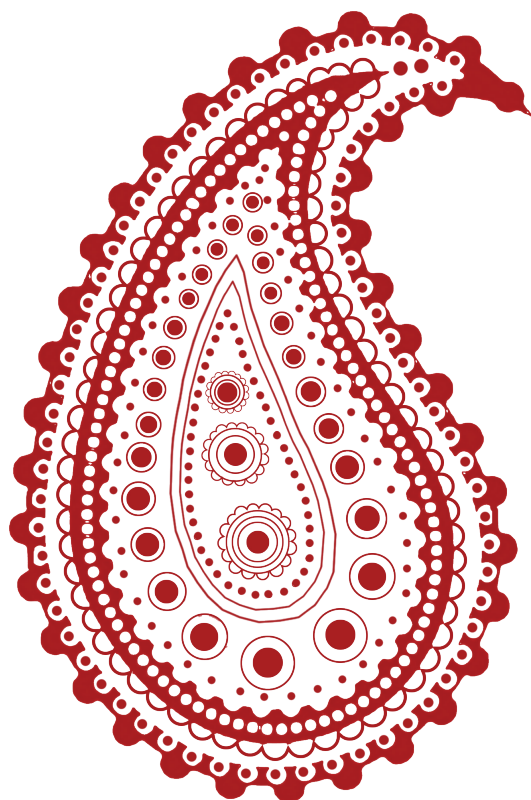
DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
IRANIAN STUDIES



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
College of International Studies
Department of International and Area Studies

Volume 1 (2016)



Iranian Studies Program

*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA®
College of International Studies*

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Volume 1 (2016)

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From the Faculty Advisor

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this inaugural issue of *DĀNESH: The OU Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies*. The initiative for this journal grew from the hard work and dedication of undergraduate students in the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies Program. In particular, I would like to acknowledge **Andrew Akhlaghi** (MA 2016) and **Elena Gharipour** (BA 2016) for their tireless effort in leading this project from its inception, in the spring of 2015, to the publication of this inaugural issue.

Since the founding of the OU Iranian Studies Program in 2011, our goal has been to promote knowledge regarding all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world. As the program has grown over the past five years, the work of OU undergraduate students in the field of Iranian Studies has become truly outstanding. The publication of *DĀNESH*, a peer-reviewed journal published under the auspices of the OU Iranian Studies Program and the OU College of International Studies, is dedicated to highlighting the research of a growing undergraduate program in Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma. As we continue to mature, we are confident that the vitality of the program will be reflected in the pages of this journal.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge*, *learning*, and *wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this goal in mind that we inaugurate the publication of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi
Farzaneh Family Chair in Iranian Studies
Director, OU Iranian Studies Program

From the Editors-in-Chief

We are extremely proud to have been a part of this project. We are proud of both the quality of research in the journal and to have been part of such a wonderful process. Each of these papers addresses an important aspect of U.S.-Iranian relations. We hope that these papers will provide much needed context and perspective to the ongoing debates on U.S.-Iranian relations.

We are also privileged to have had such a positive experience editing the journal. Our associate editors worked extremely hard on each of these papers and they were a joy to work with throughout the process. Ultimately, any journal is only as strong as the writers and in this regard we were very fortunate. All of the writers came into this process with the utmost professionalism. We are also indebted to the University of Oklahoma Libraries for helping us archive and host the journal through the SHAREOK system.

The quality and overall process of making the journal are a reflection of the kind of academic environment in the Iranian Studies program and the University of Oklahoma. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the crucial role of Dr. Afshin Marashi. Without his guidance and dedication to the Iranian Studies program, none of this would have been possible.

Andrew Akhlaghi
Elena T. Gharipour
Editors-In-Chief

The Church Committee: Unveiling the Past and Unraveling the Future

Lisa Hackert

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The Central Intelligence Agency has long been shrouded in mystery and public speculation. The agency is often cast as the perpetrator of heinous conspiracies perhaps conceived from the public's imagination or the creativity of Hollywood. The tales of the organization's involvement in assassinations, wiretapping, and eerie experiments portray the organization as rogue and powerful, acting without restraint. One particularly intriguing story details an attempt to undermine Fidel Castro's public image by painting his shoes with a shoe polish designed to cause his trademark beard to fall out.¹ This may seem like a ridiculous conspiracy theory; however, during the course of the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (often referred to as the Church Committee) this story was found to be true. The validation of such a story created suspicions in Iran about what other CIA conspiracies, especially those surrounding the 1953 Coup against Mohammed Mossadegh, were also true.²

The history of U.S.-Iranian relations was greatly altered by the covert actions of the CIA during the 1953 coup that overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh. However, the most severe damage to the two countries relations was inflicted by the confirmation of this involvement during the Church Committee's investigation into the CIA. While many in Iran may have long suspected that the U.S. government was responsible for the 1953 Coup, the final report of the Church Committee confirmed the actions of the CIA and left the Iranians wondering what else the CIA was to do.³ The revelations of the Church Committee's final report were equally important to the history of U.S.-Iranian relations, as the covert action itself led to anti-U.S. sentiment and paranoia that fueled the storming

***Author Bio:** Lisa Hackert graduated from the University of Oklahoma in Spring 2015 with a B.A. in International Security Studies.

¹ Bill Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me* (Pullman, Washington State University Press, 1995), 73.

² Ibid., 44.

³ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup* (New York and London: The New Press, 2013), 205.

of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the severing of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

History of the Coup

In order to fully understand the magnitude of the revelations made by the Church Committee, it is necessary to examine the history of the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh. A charismatic politician, Mohammed Mossadegh rose to power on the platform of national independence and constitutional rule and eventually became Prime Minister of Iran. He and his Popular Front movement eventually came to symbolize the opposition to foreign intervention and manipulation by the Great Powers.⁴ This stance by Mossadegh was an obvious threat to British interests in Iran who had an oil concession and owned the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Mossadegh's designs for Iranian independence conflicted with these concessions and he urged the Shah to sign into law the nationalization of the AIOC. Both the British and the U.S. governments believed Mossadegh was a threat to their respective interests. For Britain, it was the loss of the oil concessions, while the U.S. feared political instability under Mossadegh and the potential of a Soviet-backed takeover by the communist Tudeh Party in Iran.⁵ Mossadegh became a thorn in the side of both governments, and each government became convinced that the only solution involved his removal.

The British government, specifically the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), initially approached the Truman administration to propose a joint operation against Mossadegh. However, Truman was not persuaded. He hoped that Mossadegh's popularity could be used against the Tudeh Party.⁶ The succeeding Eisenhower administration "favored an aggressive approach to communism" and was easily persuaded, and even accusing Truman of "allowing Iran to become a second China."⁷ The arrangement of the joint coup began through the coordination of the Dulles brothers, John Foster and Allen Dulles, who were Secretary of State and Director of the CIA respectively, with the British SIS. The actual proceedings of the 1953 coup, also known as Operation AJAX, would involve a myriad of actors. This group included Kermit Roosevelt (the lead covert operations agent in the Middle East), the Shah of Iran, paid Iranian political dissidents, and Iranian military officers.⁸ Thus, with the approval of President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill, the CIA embarked on the most significant action in the history of U.S.-Iranian relations, which would ever change relations between the two countries. In order to dispose a democratically elected leader in favor of a monarchy, the CIA would violate the sovereignty of the nation of Iran and act against its proclaimed principles of non-intervention and support for the spread of democracy.

The plan for the covert operation was based on six key elements in order to achieve success and avoid exposing U.S. and British interference. First, the Tehran CIA

⁴ Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), xiv.

⁵ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 164.

⁶ Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 229.

⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁸ Ibid., 228.

station would initiate anti-Mossadegh propaganda. Second, the chosen replacement for Mossadegh, General Zahedi, would rally support from a network of military officers. Third, the U.S. Ambassador, Henderson, would solicit the support of Mohammed Reza Shah and guarantee his appointment of General Zahedi. Fourth, members of parliament would be bribed to pass a legal vote to dispose Mossadegh, followed by demonstrators marching to decry Mossadegh as “anti-religious.” Finally, if all else failed, General Zahedi’s officers would seize power militarily.⁹ The operation was not without setbacks, but was eventually successful, and resulted in the overthrow and arrest of Mohammed Mossadegh and the re-establishment of the Shah in Iran. The press reported the incident as “nothing more than a mutiny by the lower ranks against pro-Mossadegh officers.”¹⁰ Few inside the U.S. and Iran knew the truth. Until the Church Committee uncovered the CIA’s penchant for overthrowing governments, suspicions of CIA action would not be more than speculation. The CIA and SIS may have counted the operation a success at the time, but this act of betrayal would come to haunt the U.S. government and eventually contribute to the end of U.S.-Iranian relations.

Senator Frank Church

As previously stated, the full ramifications of the CIA’s covert action in Iran would not be immediately evident following the coup. Unknowingly, Senator Frank Church, Chairman of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, would play a major role in its revelation to Iran and the world. The revelation of the U.S. role in Operation Ajax would push anti-U.S. sentiment past its breaking point.

Senator Frank Church emerged from modest beginnings. He transformed from a sickly child from Boise, Idaho to an idealist and moralist Senator who aimed to weed out institutional lawlessness and expose government intervention abroad.¹¹ Senator Church’s Chairmanship of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities was more than appropriate due to his frustration with the United States’ handling of the Vietnam War and his anger over the revelation that the CIA had supported a coup against the President of Chile, Salvador Allende. Senator Church favored old-fashioned idealism and championed the idea that it was “impossible to insulate our constitutional and democratic processes at home from the kind of foreign policy we have conducted.”¹² In other words, Church believed the U.S. public had a right to know about the actions of CIA abroad and that the U.S. government must answer for its indiscretions.

Creation of the Church Committee

The establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Affairs, which would later be known as the Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation, followed closely behind the telling revelation of the Watergate scandal and the corruption that was previously concealed from the U.S. public. According to Senator Church’s press secretary, Bill Hall, “The press created the Senate Intelligence committee. It was a series

⁹ Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 237.

¹⁰ Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*, 187.

¹¹ LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1994), 1,453.

¹² *Ibid.*, 468.

of investigative reports, initially in the New York Times and subsequently elsewhere.”¹³ The CIA had long enjoyed a history of secrecy and lack of public oversight that could no longer be allowed following the media circus that surrounded the improprieties confessed by then CIA Director Colby. The Democratic Caucus debated the establishment of a Senate investigation of the CIA. Finally, in January of 1975 Senate Resolution 21 was introduced to create a “Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities.”¹⁴ The resolution, of course, passed and the eleven-member committee was to be headed by Senator Frank Church. Senator Mike Mansfield outlined the purpose of the committee. He insisted that the committee would neither destroy the intelligence community, nor would it serve as a witch-hunt, but instead would measure the activities of the community against current laws and policies.¹⁵

Opposition to the Church Committee

The creation of the Church Committee was not necessarily welcomed by the Ford administration. The administration feared damage to U.S. national security. Barry Goldwater openly objected on the grounds that there now existed “an increased possibility of inadvertent disclosure of information that could be damaging to America’s foreign policy.”¹⁶ The attacks against the Church Committee only intensified and the fears of putting U.S. national security and the intelligence community at risk were used to undermine the mission of transparency and accountability. In his memoirs, President Gerald Ford describes the Committee as “sensational and irresponsible” and Kissinger called it an “assault on American Foreign Policy.”¹⁷ The reality is probably somewhere in between.

While this paper does argue that the revelations of the Church Committee contributed to the breakdown of relations between the United States and Iran, and also supplied rhetoric to anti-U.S. entities hoping to dissolve ties between the two nations, the truth remains that people suffered at the hands of CIA covert action. Goldwater was correct in asserting that it would damage U.S. foreign policy, because it undoubtedly diminished the U.S. government’s reputation of idealism abroad and indicated to Iranians that they were still at risk to U.S. government meddling. That being said, the opposition was likely just as concerned about what indiscretions of the CIA or the current and previous administrations might be revealed if the Senate began to investigate. Richard Nixon willingly cooperated with the investigation, but his remarks about the Committee’s oversight and how it threatened the power of the Executive Branch was enough to indicate to the Senate that the CIA was indeed out of control.¹⁸ Senator was deeply concerned that the CIA and various administrations had carried out operations that, if revealed, would do irreparable damage to U.S. foreign policy. This was why Senator

¹³ Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me*, 44.

¹⁴ David Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” in *Congress Investigates: A Critical and Documentary History*, ed. Roger A. Bruns, David L. Hostetter, and Raymond W. Smock (New York: Facts on File, 2011), 932.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Hall, *Frank Church, D.C., and Me*, 50.

¹⁷ Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 947.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 950.

Church believed that the need for oversight of the intelligence community took precedence over the need to keep hidden the secrets of the CIA.

Church Committee Report on Assassination and Covert Action

The Church Committee launched “one of the most important congressional investigations in U.S. history” and what would be known in CIA history as the “first probe of any consequence that Congress had ever conducted into Agency operations.”¹⁹ The Church Committee’s investigation would reveal multiple foreign interventions and, perhaps unbeknownst to its participants, confirm Iranian suspicions that the U.S. government had betrayed Iranian trust and friendship. The cases that follow exemplify the methods of the CIA and reveal the true nature of U.S. foreign policy of the period.

The Committee’s investigation led to the revelation of CIA involvement, at home and abroad, in heinous and morally questionable activities. Such activities included assassination attempts on multiple foreign leaders including: Congo, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam, and Chile.²⁰ One committee member decried the findings and reportedly told the press, “It is simply intolerable that an agency of the United States government may engage in murder.”²¹ The findings of the report detailed CIA cooperation with assassins, but were unable to prove any direct actions taken by the CIA or the U.S. government. The final report on the assassinations attempt concluded that, “Administration officials failed to rule out assassination as a tool of foreign policy and to make clear to their subordinates that assassination was impermissible.” Although the investigation was a severe intrusion and embarrassment for the CIA, the wording of the hearings final documents leans towards leniency, and the Committee even faced criticism by government officials for conducting such an exposé. Kissinger himself declared that it “had done so much harm to this nation’s capacity to conduct foreign policy.”²² At the very least, the hearing revealed that the CIA had taken extraordinary measures to insure that any foreign opposition would be snuffed out if it felt that it was in the interest of the U.S. More shocking was the level of authorization of CIA operations and the power that the Executive Branch wielded in the form of the CIA. The comments by Kissinger and many others of the CIA’s defenders revealed the blatant disregard for transparency and the lack of morality governing the actions of the Agency.

Apart from the assassination plots, the Church Committee also found that the CIA engaged in covert operations abroad with the intent of interfering with the domestic affairs of foreign governments. The Committee focused on five specific programs conducted by the CIA and produced six different reports, but only made the report on Chile open to the public. The final report revealed that the CIA had conducted over 900 covert action projects and several thousand smaller projects, which were never released outside of the organization.²³ The section of the report that details the covert action in

¹⁹ Ibid., 933.

²⁰ U.S. Congress. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, “Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders”. (Washington, U.S. Government Press, 1975), III.

²¹ Rudgers. “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 939.

²² Ibid.

²³ David Rudgers, “The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation,” 946.

Chile confirmed that, between the years of 1970 and 1973, over 8 million dollars was used in attempts to support a military coup in Chile.²⁴ The possibility of CIA direct involvement and CIA funding of right-wing terror groups both raised concerns. In the end, the CIA's monetary contributions and its lack of transparency with supervising agencies such as the State Department were cited as its major indiscretions. No direct actions were ever documented in the public report.

Although the Church Committee only revealed the Chile report on covert action, and there exists only one minor speculative reference to CIA involvement Iran in the whole of the investigation's report, the final report on CIA covert action and assassination attempts did significant damage to the reputation of the U.S. government. The only reference to Iran was included as a statement to imply a mischaracterization of CIA action in Iran but not a denial of it. David A. Phillips, a then retired CIA officer, stated, "As you are aware, the popular characterization of the role played by CIA in Iran was that the CIA also got on the top of the tanks and led the troops into the palace."²⁵ The true and far reaching impact of the Church Committee's investigation was not only the confirmation of covert actions abroad, but also the policy that the U.S. government would maintain following the disclosure. The official government policy was to continue covert actions abroad, but they "should only be employed only in exceptional cases where vital U.S. interests were at stake."²⁶ This policy left U.S. foreign policy up to interpretation and speculation. The case of Iran was no different.

The Church Committee Findings and Iran

The Church Committee findings were particularly relevant to Iran in 1976. Following the 1953 Coup, the Shah returned to power unopposed and transformed the country from a democracy into a dictatorship. The Shah's unpopular policies and repression of dissent eventually reached a breaking point. The U.S. government's friendship towards the Shah made him appear as a puppet governor on behalf of U.S. interests.²⁷ Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the CIA's clandestine actions abroad painted the U.S. as an intervening power and threat to Iranian independence. If the CIA were manipulating governments in Cuba and Chile, surely they would once again protect U.S. interests inside Iran.

The legacy of the 1953 was not easily forgotten and even the Shah became paranoid. He believed that the CIA was plotting to dispose him.²⁸ This was significant that even while viewed as a U.S. ally, the Shah's very knowledge of the CIA's capabilities and its tendency towards covert actions made any opposition to his rule seem like the beginning of a coup. The actions of the U.S. government further inspired feelings of mistrust among anti-Shah Iranians and fueled the fires of anti-U.S. sentiment. Since the CIA was seen as crucial to returning the Shah to power, the Iranian people had no choice but to conclude that the U.S. also sponsored the repressive tactics of the Shah.

²⁴ U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, "Covert Actions," *Hearings: Volume 7*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ Rudgers, "The Church Committee on Intelligence Activities Investigation," 946.

²⁷ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 219.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

During the Senate investigations, there existed in Iranian publications an ongoing conversation about U.S. imperialism in Iran and also the threat posed by the CIA to the already destabilizing Iranian government. The Senate hearing occurred during a time of increasing political instability and resistance to the Shah's rule. As early as June 1975, radio broadcasts in Iran subtly mentioned that the U.S. was cooperating with Iran in espionage and that the U.S. set up a "huge radio electronic spy center in the Persian Gulf area."²⁹ It was evident that even the media was closely monitoring the possible actions of the U.S. in the region. The growing resentment against the Shah not only made him nervous, but also left the people of Iran holding their breath to see if the CIA would once again intervene. As the dawn of the revolutions drew near, the broadcasts of the Iranian opposition grew much more bold and inflammatory. When U.S. covert actions were openly admitted and the CIA's role in 1953 Coup speculation had been verified, the media in Iran expressed the responsibility quite plainly.

In an interview conducted in Paris that was subsequently broadcasted in Iran in November of 1978, the leader of the National Front spoke openly about the history of his party with the U.S. He described the National Front as "the heir to the oil nationalism movement of Mossadegh. It is the movement which led this struggle in the 1950s and which became the victim of repression after the coup of 1953 which was hatched by the American CIA."³⁰ In this commentary, the leader of the National Front did something very powerful that likely magnified any Iranian listeners' frustration with the U.S. He very directly made the connection between the National Front of Mossadegh and his movement that opposed the Shah in the present-day. He underscored that fact the Front was repressed at that time due to U.S. government interference and reminded the audience that the CIA was responsible. This connection was powerful, because it allowed the audience to connect past U.S. government opposition to the National Front to the present movement. From this statement, the audience could draw the conclusion that the U.S. government was against them in the past and was once again against them in their ongoing struggle.

The hostility towards the U.S. and the possibility of CIA action seemed to build as the outbreak of the revolution drew nearer. The National Voice of Iran radio broadcast spoke out directly against U.S. imperialism and no doubt caused widespread hysteria by announcing that "a large group of CIA agents arrived on two special planes and they are currently busy hatching plots against the Iranian people."³¹ Regardless of the truth, it was no longer farfetched for the CIA to be conducting actions in Iran based on what the Iranian people knew of the CIA. The Church Committee's open report confirmed the very recent covert actions of the CIA around the world, which proved that the Coup of 1953 was not ancient history for the CIA, nor was it uncharacteristic behavior.

Further heightening suspicions of U.S. government actions in Iran, broadcasts from outside Iran, specifically from the Soviet Union, served to reinforce fears for those expecting intervention by the U.S. government. In December 1978, broadcasts from Moscow by Soviet media, in Persian, attempted to incite anti-U.S. sentiment by stating the following:

²⁹ "U.S., Iran to Cooperate in Espionage Operations". *Iran Courier*. 2 June 1975, as published in Daily Report. Middle East and North Africa, FBIS-MEA-75-108 on 1975-06-04:, R1.

³⁰ "National Front Leader Interviewed on Paris Radio," *FBIS-MEA*, November 7, 1978, R5.

³¹ "National Voice of Iran on Threat of U.S. Imperialism," *FBIS-MEA*, December 15, 1978, R13.

Frequently, when the United States expands its activities designed to interfere in the affairs of other countries and defend the plundering interests of the U.S. imperialists, the CIA, for the purpose of concealment creates a smokescreen of rumors about communist plots.³²

This broadcast was obviously self-serving on the part of the Soviet Union. It also went on to say that it was public knowledge that the U.S. operated inside Iran at the time and manipulated the government. Further, the broadcast highlighted that the U.S. government made billions of dollars off of arms sales to Iran.³³ The outside confirmation of Iranian suspicions was likely even more powerful than the legacy of suspicions against the CIA inside Iran. The rhetoric of such broadcasts compounded the existing frustrations with the Shah's government and the perceived U.S. support for his government. By 1979, it was not illogical for the Iranian public to fear CIA involvement in the country and it was not difficult for Ayatollah Khomeini to convince protesting students that the CIA was plotting "a repeat performance of 1953" from the U.S. Embassy and it was under this pretext that he convinced those same students to march on and overtake the U.S. Embassy. This began the 444-day hostage crisis and the end of U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations.³⁴

Conclusion

The intent of the Church Committee to delve into the mysterious depths of the CIA's hidden history and hold accountable those who apparently felt above the law was well intentioned. The impact of the public revelations of the CIA's disregard for national sovereignty and its tendency to favor dictatorships over democratically elected leaders confirmed what many who were suspicious of the U.S. already knew. The U.S. government acted hypocritically and in contrast to their policies that supposedly supported self-determination for other nations. More importantly, the Church Committee's report verified the doubts of Iranians and transformed the legacy of friendship between the two nations into a story of betrayal and mistrust. The 1953 Coup was a deep wound in the history of Iran. By 1976, the tensions created by the Shah's government reopened this wound. The betrayal of 1953 and the continued U.S. government support for the Shah gave the opposition exactly what they needed to ignite the passions of the people and fuel a revolution. The Church Committee may have never explicitly confirmed CIA actions against Iran but the new image it painted of the U.S. was enough to foster anti-Americanism and make an enemy out of Iran. The U.S. government admission that the CIA disregarded the sovereignty of nations all over the world was broadcasted from Paris, Moscow, and Iran. It created hysteria and fears of impending U.S. intervention. The CIA actions of 1953 left a legacy that influenced the final breakdown in relations during the 1979 Revolution and continues to foster mistrust between the two nations up to present day.

³² "U.S. Propaganda Efforts Condemned," *FBIS-MEA*, 5 December, 1978, F1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 225.