

ROUNDTABLE: MOSSADEQ'S OUSTER AT 70 – LEGACIES AND MEMORIES

A Man for All Seasons: Mosaddeq's Image and Legacy in Contemporary Iran

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The unwavering commitment of the people to the leadership of the Islamic Revolution, coupled with the willingness of political elites to demonstrate selflessness and sacrifice, can effectively thwart any potential colonial ambitions that might once again threaten the nation. The historical backdrop of the 28 Mordad coup (August 19) serves as a valuable lesson for the years to come in our country. Much like how colonialists were defeated during the uprisings of the 30 Tir (July 21), the 25 Mordad (16 August), and the events of the autumn of 2022, this legacy of resistance and resilience can endure into the future.¹

If seventy years ago, foreigners orchestrated the tragic coup on the 28 Mordad 1332 (August 19, 1953) against the Iranian people, today, the rulers of Iran have instigated a new coup against the happiness and rightful demands of the people. . . . Do the rulers not learn from the consequences of the 28 Mordad coup, which resulted in the 1979 Revolution?²

The seventieth anniversary of the 1953 coup d'état that toppled the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq prompted a moment of reflection in Iran, shedding light on a pivotal chapter in the country's modern history.³ The two quotations presented above, each in its distinctive way, invoke the profound and enduring consequences of those tumultuous years while drawing pertinent connections to contemporary circumstances. They establish a link between the fateful events leading to the coup and the 2022 surge of civil unrest and waves of protests under the slogan Women, Life, Freedom (Zan, Zendegi, Azadi), sparked by the tragic death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody that September after she was arrested

¹ "Mehr Gozaresh mi-Dahad; Kudeta-ye 28 Mordad; Darsi ke 70 Sale Shod," *Mehr News Agency*, 19 August 2023. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5864493/%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AA%D8%A7%DB%8C-%DB%B2%DB%B8-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%DB%B7%DB%B0-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF>. In March 1951, nationalist Mohammed Mosaddeq became prime minister, seizing control of the oil industry from the British, which sparked tensions with Britain and the shah, ultimately leading to his resignation. The date 30 Tir, corresponding to July 21, 1952, marks the beginning of demonstrations triggered by Mosaddeq's resignation. Then, 25 Mordad (August 16, 1953), is the date of the suppressed coup against Mosaddeq, culminating in the shah's flight to Baghdad.

² "Zahra Rahnavard: Haeman az Kudeta-ye 28 Mordad Pand Nemi-girand, Suquteshan Dardnak Khahad Bud," BBC, 19 August 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/cl5g49zxpqko>.

³ "Goftogu-ye Ahmad Gholami ba Daryush Rahmaniyan va Karim Soleymani Darbare-ye Kudeta-ye 28 Mordad, Jang-e Revayat-ha," *Sharq*, 4 December 2023. <https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-100/908642-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7>.

for violating the Islamic Republic's dress code. Each quotation reflects a continuity of collective memory and the use of historical narratives to shape current perspectives.

In contemporary Iranian discourse, the depiction of Mosaddeq weaves a complex narrative marked by contention and veneration. Despite sustained efforts to downplay Mosaddeq's legacy both in the post-coup Pahlavi era and in the Islamic Republic, his image persists and exhibits remarkable resilience.⁴ Diverse actors, including government authorities, scholars, activists, and interest groups, exert influence over the contemporary discourse surrounding Mosaddeq's legacy, each advancing their respective agenda and interpretation of past events.⁵

The enduring waves of interest in Mosaddeq and his legacy, marked by moments of ebb and flow, are fueled by a rich tapestry of dramatic elements—assassinations, psychological warfare, orchestrated civil unrest, intricate political maneuvers, and covert operations executed by both the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British foreign intelligence (MI6).⁶ This dramatic backdrop seamlessly extends into cultural domains in which Mosaddeq's image and legacy continue to resonate, finding expression in recent literary works such as Kamali Marjan's novel *The Stationary Shop of Tehran* (2019), and on screen in Taghi Amirani's documentary *Coup 53* (2019) and Masoud Kimiai's drama film *Khaen-Koshi* (Killing a Traitor, 2022).

Mosaddeq's representations have become influential instruments deployed by diverse political factions, effectively shaping conflicting objectives and counternarratives. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in the dynamic nature of collective memory, which actively shapes interpretations of historical events to influence, elucidate, and imbue present-day narratives with significance.⁷ Strategic use of historical analogies and analogical reasoning further accentuate this dynamic, serving as cognitive shortcuts with multifaceted roles—aiding comprehension in intricate situations, acting as rhetorical devices within political discourse, and emphasizing the moral dimensions inherent in contemporary issues.

Mosaddeq's Resurgence in the “Era of Optimism”

In March 1999, on the thirty-second anniversary of Mosaddeq's passing, a diverse assembly comprised of his former associates and young nationalist activists embarked on a pilgrimage to his burial site.⁸ This event held significance because it marked the first notable commemoration of his legacy in two decades.⁹ The last major public tribute at his gravesite had occurred in March 1979, shortly after the downfall of the Pahlavi monarchy. At that time, almost all political groups and parties in the country, including national, Marxist, right-wing, and religious factions, issued a call for a gathering on the occasion of Mosaddeq's memorial anniversary. The event held in Ahmadabad in his honor witnessed a massive turnout. However, the newspapers presented divergent attendance figures, with the daily *Ittila'at* (Information) estimating one million and *Kayhan* (The Universe) suggesting

⁴ Kaveh Basmenji, *Tehran Blues: How Iranian Youth Rebelled against Iran's Founding Fathers* (London: Saqi, 2005), 65.

⁵ Since its inception, the postrevolutionary regime has prioritized historical writing as a crucial element in shaping its official state narrative. For a more in-depth exploration, see Amir Shahram Kholdi, “The Politics of Memory in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Historiography of the 1979 Revolution” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2011).

⁶ Mostafa Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), xiii.

⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ The term “The Era of Optimism” is adopted from Mohammad Ali Kadivars paper “Alliances and Perception Profiles in the Iranian Reform Movement, 1997 to 2005,” *American Sociological Review* 78, no. 6 (2013): 1073.

⁹ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), 182.

millions.¹⁰ This discrepancy led to subsequent skepticism regarding the precision and scale of the reported attendance figures.¹¹ Prominent among the participants was the revolutionary cleric Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani (1911–79), affiliated with the Freedom Movement (Nehzat-e Azadi). This movement was established in the early 1960s by Mehdi Bazargan (1907–95) and other former members of the National Front (Jebhe-ye Mellî), founded in 1949 by Mosaddeq. Taleqani delivered a noteworthy speech at the event, further highlighting the diverse composition and historical significance of the assembly.¹²

The village of Ahmadabad, where the commemoration ceremony took place, is located 120 kilometers from Tehran. In the heart of this small village lies Mosaddeq's ancestral family estate, where he was exiled and placed under house arrest after the 1953 coup. Upon Mosaddeq's passing in 1967, the shah rejected his wish to be buried in the Ibn Babouyeh cemetery in the town of Ray, alongside victims of the July 1952 political clashes.¹³ Consequently, Mosaddeq found his final resting place in one of the estate's rooms.¹⁴ This rejection, coupled with a longstanding prohibition on public gatherings commemorating Mosaddeq's national contributions, emphasized the profound significance of the high-profile pilgrimage to his burial place in March 1979. Four months after the mentioned commemoration, a 3.3-meter-high memorial was erected in the Ibn Babouyeh cemetery by Mosaddeq's colleagues and supporters. However, within about a week of its installation, the memorial was vandalized, causing it to collapse. This incident raised concerns within Mosaddeq's family about potential tampering with his remains if they were moved.¹⁵ Nonetheless, his descendants hold hope that someday his wish to be buried in the cemetery will be fulfilled.¹⁶

In the wake of internal political shifts within the revolutionary camp following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the nature of Mosaddeq's commemorations transformed. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89), while ascending to the position of the supreme spiritual leader during that period, discredited members of the National Front. He accused them of apostasy for their opposition to the Bill of Retribution, which, passed in 1981, prescribed death by stoning for female adulterers. Additionally, he labeled Mosaddeq as *mortad* (apostate).¹⁷

¹⁰ "Gozareshi az Chingunegi-ye bar Gozari-ye Marasem-e Salmarg-e Doktor Mohammad Mosaddeq dar Ruz-e 14 Esfand 1357, dar Ahmadabad" 5 March 2010. http://www.ois-iran.com/2017/azar-1396/ois-iran-7729_gozareshe_maraseme_salmarge_dr.Mossadegh_da_14_esfande_1357_dar_ahmadabad.htm.

¹¹ "Tausifat-e Ayatollah Taleqani az Doktor Mosaddeq - Taqato'-ye yek Tavallod va yek Marg," *Khabar Online*, 4 March 2020. <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1360502/%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B5%DB%8C%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AF-%D9%88-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%AF>.

¹² Ahmad Zeydabadi, "Mosaddeq az Tabu ta Abzar!," *Asr-e Iran*, 21 August 2023. <https://www.asriran.com/fa/news/903986/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C>. The Freedom Movement advocated for Mosaddeq's vision, promoting a constitutional monarchy in which the shah served as the formal head of state without executive power. Bazargan was a key figure in the revolution and served as the first prime minister of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran (February to November 1979).

¹³ T. Cuyler Young, "Iran in Continuing Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 40, no. 2 (1962): 277. The cemetery, named after the prominent 10th-century Muslim Shi'a scholar, 'Ali ibn Babawayh Qummi, is alternatively spelled Ebn-e Babviyeh, Ebn-e Babooyeh, or Ibn Babawayh.

¹⁴ Mosaddeq's expressed wish was to find his final resting place alongside twenty-five of his supporters who perished in the clashes of Si-e-Tir or 30 Tir/July 21, 1952. See also footnote 1.

¹⁵ Gholam-Hossein Mossadegh, interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, Paris, 2 July 1984, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, transcript 3 (seq. 68–81), 12.

¹⁶ Mehrnoush Cheragh Abadi, "Remembering Mossadegh: The Anti-Imperialist Icon that Tehran, London and Washington Would Rather Forget," *Equal Times*, 16 March 2020.

¹⁷ Masoud Kazemzadeh, *The Iran National Front and the Struggle for Democracy* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2022), 83. In 2018, the issue of Ayatollah Khomeini's reservations regarding Mosaddeq's faith came to the forefront of public debate after the reformist city council of Tehran announced its decision to rename one of the capital's streets in

Despite the revolutionary government having previously issued a stamp in commemoration of Mosaddeq, various forms of public remembrance, including the renaming of Pahlavi Street in his honor, faced reevaluation. This reassessment ultimately led to the street's subsequent renaming as Valiasr, in reference to Mohammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth imam.¹⁸

As the Islamic Republic further solidified its power, navigating the legacy of Mosaddeq became a complex challenge for the new regime.¹⁹ His embodiment of secular Iranian nationalism and adherence to social beliefs diverged from the revolutionary government's values; simultaneously, his unwavering opposition to the Pahlavi regime and imperialism resonated with the core principles of the Islamic Republic.²⁰ In contrast to other figures celebrated for antimonarchical and anticolonial contributions, such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–69) and 'Ali Shari'ati (1933–77), Mosaddeq faced unique treatment.²¹ Deliberate removal of his posters and pictures from films documenting events leading to the 1979 revolution underscored efforts to reshape historical narratives.²² High school textbooks downplayed Mosaddeq's significance, redirecting attention to figures like Ayatollah Abolqassem Kashani (1882–1962), among the few leading and popular high-ranking clerics at the time who initially supported the campaign to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. Serving as the speaker of the majlis during the oil nationalization, Kashani ultimately turned against Mosaddeq in the 1953 coup d'état.²³ Historical accounts, in later years, displayed hesitancy toward Mosaddeq, framing the 1951–53 period as a leftist betrayal of the nationalist cause. This trend aligned with broader efforts to marginalize leftist ideologies, co-opting nonreligious nationalists, often referred to in scholarly literature as "Mosaddeqists."²⁴

Internal factional divisions within the Iranian political system, which gained prominence by the 1990s, persistently manifested conflicting narratives surrounding Mosaddeq's legacy. Within the revolutionary camp, the conservative right wing, interchangeably referred to as "principalists" or hard-liners, comprising both clerical and nonclerical components, continued to actively oppose the promotion of Mosaddeq's legacy, emphasizing the pivotal role of

Mosaddeq's honor; see, for instance, "Tafasir-e Taze Darbare-ye Manzur-e Emam az Moslem Nabudan Mosaddeq," *Tarikh-e Iran*, 25 September 2019. <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/8216/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82>.

¹⁸ Mohsen Kadivar, "Defa' az Mosalmani-ye Mosaddeq!" Kadivar's official website, 14 March 2017. <https://kadivar.com/15880>.

¹⁹ Roham Alvandi and Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The United States Overthrew Iran's Last Democratic Leader," *Foreign Policy*, 30 October 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/30/the-united-states-overthrew-irans-last-democratic-leader>.

²⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 92.

²¹ See, for instance, L. Hendelman-Baavur, "The Odyssey of Jalal Al-Ahmad's Gharbzadegi: Five Decades After," in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Kamran Talattof (London: Routledge, 2015), 258–86.

²² Basmenji, *Tehran Blues*, 65.

²³ Hamideh Mirhosseyni, "Goftogu ba 'Ali Bigdeli: Nadide Gereftan Eshtebahat-e Doktor Mosaddeq az Tahrifat-e Tarikhi ast," *IBNA News Agency*, 19 August 2023. <https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/news/24267/%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C%DA%AF%D8%AF%D9%84%DB%8C---%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D9%87-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>. It is important to note that Kashani had a complex political trajectory, and his positions shifted over time. Although he initially supported Mosaddeq, he later distanced himself from the nationalist movement, partly due to ideological differences and concerns about the direction of the country.

²⁴ Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 92.

members of the religious establishment in the national narrative.²⁵ Conversely, the reformist faction, inclusive of both clerics and nonclerics, venerated Mosaddeq as an emblematic figure symbolizing national liberation, adherence to the rule of law, and democratic principles. Advocates of this perspective also emphasized his pioneering role as an anticolonial figure, with implications extending beyond the region.²⁶

Despite persistent efforts to diminish Mosaddeq's central role in the historical narrative, he has indirectly endured in the nation's collective memory. His ideals and actions resonate through the commemorations of pivotal events that, while not explicitly attributed to him, are intrinsically linked to principles he championed. These include significant anniversaries marked by the Islamic Republic, such as Oil Nationalization Day (29 Esfand/March 20, 1951), the anniversary of the 1953 coup (28 Mordad/August 19), and the National Day against Global Arrogance (13 Aban/November 4), which commemorates the takeover of the US embassy in 1979.²⁷ Such events serve as focal points in cultural memory. Furthermore, the toponymical transformation of Si-e Tir Street in Tehran, formerly Ahmad Qavam Street, stands as an additional indirect commemorative gesture, intricately linked to events associated with the era of Mosaddeq's premiership.²⁸

Mosaddeq's indirect remembrance and the 1999 commemoration ceremony in Ahmadabad marked a renewed interest in his image and public engagement with his legacy, unfolding against the backdrop of Mohammad Khatami's (r. 1997–2005) unexpected victory in the 1997 presidential election. During this period, the reform movement led by Khatami experienced a surge in support from key demographics, such as the middle class, youth, and women. This upswing played a pivotal role in Khatami's landslide victory, as diverse groups united behind his promises of ushering in an Islamic civil society and advancing political reform, the rule of law, freedom, and religious democracy.²⁹

Concerns within the conservative camp, particularly following defeat in local municipal elections, revolved around the perceived cultural "infiltration" (*nofuz*) or "invasion" (*tahajom*) of Western influences and their potential impact on Iranian youth.³⁰ These concerns intersected with the swift response of the traditionalist right-wing press, which seized the opportunity to scrutinize Mosaddeq's legacy during the temporary revival of his public commemoration. In 1999, during the rule of the conservative fifth majlis, a proposal to replace the holiday dedicated to commemorating the nationalization of Iran's oil industry with a religious holiday ignited a vehement public response from segments of the Iranian population increasingly conscious of their national, secular values. Ultimately, the majlis declined to pursue the elimination of the commemorative holiday, recognizing its significance in Iran's modern history.³¹

The year 1999 also witnessed student demonstrations, indicating a stronger inclination toward secular democracy and nationalism.³² In response to escalating repression,

²⁵ Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i promotes a narrative emphasizing Ayatollah Kashani as the first and foremost figure in the nationalization of the oil industry. His portrayal underscores the pivotal role of the religious establishment in mobilizing popular support and achieving significant national objectives. For a summary of Khamenei's views on the subject, see his official website, Khamenei.ir;

"Piroozi va Shekast dar Meli Shodan-e San'at-e Naft," 16 March 2023. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=52221>.

²⁶ Mirhosseini, "Goftogu ba `Ali Bigdeli," *IBNA*.

²⁷ The observance of the National Day against Global Arrogance in Iran often includes mentions of the 1953 coup, highlighting the much-resented US intervention in Iranian politics.

²⁸ In commemoration of the July 21, 1952 pro-Mosaddeq uprising. See also footnotes 1 and 14. Ahmad Qavam (d. 1955) was an Iranian politician who served as prime minister of Iran five times, under both the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties.

²⁹ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?* 182; Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy* (London: Gingko, Chatham House, 2019), 112.

³⁰ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?* 182.

³¹ Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, 205.

³² Reza Mohajerinejad, *Live Generation: Iran's 1999 Student Uprising That Opened the Door for Secular Democracy* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010).

nationalists within the reformist camp emphasized the need for collective action, urging Khatami to adopt the political style of Mosaddeq, who effectively mobilized mass support during the early 1950s nationalization efforts.³³ Concurrently, anecdotal memories reverberated in the media. In an interview, Mehdi Karroubi, a moderate cleric heading the Islamic left-wing Combatant Clerics Society (Majma'-e Rowhaniyun-e Mobarez), shared that Ayatollah Khomeini's older brother used to carry a picture of Mosaddeq alongside one of his younger brother.³⁴ This personal anecdote conveyed to critics the notion that Mosaddeq's memory previously enjoyed a level of respect and recognition similar to that of the founding father of the Islamic Republic.

Reformist campaigns, particularly focusing on engaging the urban middle class of young people and women, resurrected Mosaddeq as an emblematic figure from an era synonymous with political freedoms denied in postrevolutionary Iran. They accentuated his role as a proponent of democratic ideals, seeking to establish a connection between Mosaddeq's era and the yearning for enhanced political emancipation, countering the constraints imposed by the Islamic Republic.³⁵ According to Christopher De Bellaigue, a journalist and Mosaddeq's biographer, who arrived in Iran in 2000, Mosaddeq had by that time "become a poster boy for the younger generation," despite the reservations of the ruling hard-liners.³⁶

The resurgence of interest in Mosaddeq's legacy at the turn of the millennium mirrored a multifaceted response to evolving sociopolitical dynamics. In addition to internal factors, significant external influences were at play. In 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright publicly acknowledged the US involvement in the 1953 coup. This admission marked a departure from prior official positions, signifying a turning point in recognizing historically contentious events. Simultaneously, a leaked CIA classified report detailing covert US actions during the coup became accessible to the public.³⁷ These episodes unfolded against the backdrop of a diplomatic recalibration in US-Iran relations, in which a strategic effort to address historical grievances aimed to signal a new era in the relationship between the two countries.³⁸

Transformative Legacies

A renewed wave of engagement with Mosaddeq's legacy aligned with the emergence of the Green Movement, which unfolded in response to the disputed presidential election of 2009. The reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sparked allegations of electoral fraud, triggering large-scale protests and civil unrest. Reformist and moderate political figures, including presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Karroubi, who contested the election results, emerged as the movement's leaders. Supporters of these leaders and their political platforms joined the protests to demand electoral transparency, political reforms, and increased civil liberties in Iran. Once again Mosaddeq's image was resurrected in these demonstrations.³⁹ Commentators drawing parallels between former Prime Minister Mousavi and Mosaddeq pointed out that despite the historical distinctions between their respective contexts, both leaders succeeded in galvanizing mass movements and attracting international attention. Additionally, their shared commitment to challenging established

³³ Kadivar, "Alliances and Perception Profiles," 1075.

³⁴ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?* 182.

³⁵ Rosemarie Scullion, "Feminizing National Memory: Mosaddeq, Milani and 'The Hidden Half,'" *South Central Review* 23, no. 2 (2006): 3.

³⁶ Christopher De Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mosaddeq and a Very British Coup* (London: Vintage, 2013), 4.

³⁷ James Risen, "Secrets of History: The C.I.A. in Iran; A Special Report; How a Plot Convulsed Iran in '53 (and in '79)," *New York Times*, 16 April 2000.

³⁸ Shiva Balaghi, "Silenced Histories and Sanitized Autobiographies: The 1953 CIA Coup in Iran," *Biography* 36, no. 1 (2013): 71–96.

³⁹ De Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia*, 4.

political authority led to state repression, as evidenced by Mosaddeq's removal from power through the 1953 coup and Mousavi's supporters facing a government crackdown.⁴⁰

Within conservative circles, historical analogies also are frequently employed to shape different interpretations of past events. During one of his weekly political sermons, Ahmad Alamolhoda, the Friday prayer leader of Mashhad and father-in-law of the late President Ebrahim Raisi (r. 2021–24), drew parallels between historical figures who opposed the religious authority (*velayat*) and individuals like Mosaddeq and Mousavi. In this context, Alamolhoda insinuated that these figures were not genuine patriots or authentic leaders, but rather individuals who ultimately worked against Iran's interests and religious leadership.⁴¹

When Iranian authorities subjected Mousavi and Karroubi to house confinement, a renewed analogy to Mosaddeq emerged in reformist social media outlets. In 2011, rumors circulated about the potential transfer of Mousavi and Karroubi from house confinement to Heshmatieh, a prison facility operated by the Revolutionary Guards in northeastern Tehran. Their supporters drew parallels between Heshmatieh prison and Mosaddeq's residence in Ahmadabad, which effectively served as his prison until his passing in 1967, conveying the cautionary message: "We should not let history repeat itself."⁴²

In response to the Green Movement's appropriation of Mosaddeq's legacy, an orchestrated counternarrative unfolded, strategically propelled by Ahmadinejad's advisers and supporters. This initiative aimed to bolster Ahmadinejad's legitimacy and cast his government as the rightful heir to the ideals synonymous with self-reliance and resistance against external pressures—attributes historically associated with Mosaddeq's era. Central to this narrative was the assertion that Ahmadinejad was democratically elected amid mounting internal and external pressures, purportedly aimed at delegitimizing his government. Simultaneously, they posited that the Green Movement, perceived as antirevolutionary, had alleged foreign support, insinuating interference in Iran's domestic affairs. Moreover, a parallel was drawn between Mosaddeq's oil nationalization and Iran's right to advance a nuclear program, both of which faced Western pressures that led to sanctions and international isolation.⁴³

On the fringe of the political discourse, additional voices were emerging, notably that of the liberal intellectual and senior economist Mousa Ghaninejad, who drew parallels between Ahmadinejad and Mosaddeq based on their populism. Advocates of this notion emphasized the strategic use of populist appeals by both leaders, positioning themselves as champions of the common people against entrenched elites and foreign influence. This comparative analysis suggested that both leaders adeptly utilized nationalist rhetoric to rally support from diverse segments of the Iranian population and disrupt the country's economy.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, "Do Nakhost Vazir dar yek Qab | Negahi be Mosaddeq va Mousavi," *Ensaf News*, 4 December 2020. <http://www.ensafnews.com/225621/%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%88>.

⁴¹ "Entekad Tond 'Alem al-Hoda az Mir Hoseyn Musavi, Mosaddeq va Bani Sadr,'" *Khabar Online*, 22 July 2022. <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1663834/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%88%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1>.

⁴² "Nagozarim Tarikh Takrar Shod!" *Ghalbir*, 4 March 2011. <https://ghalbir.wordpress.com/2011/03/04/%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE-%D8%AA%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF>.

⁴³ Ardashir Ommani, "Mosaddeq va Ahmadinejad," *Rasekhoon*, 20 September 2010. <https://rasekhoon.net/article/show/161932>. Ardashir Ommani, "Tashbih-e Ahmadinejad be Mosaddeq," *Yazd Farda*, 20 May 2013. <http://www.yazdfarda.com/news/af/69727/%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82>. "Hameh-ye Shebhath-ye Mosaddeq va Ahmadinejad!," *Khabar Online*, 8 March 2017. <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/644122/%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF>.



Figure 1. Top row (left to right): cover of Bahram Afrasiabi’s *Mordad-e Khamush Khordad-e Khodjoosh* (2000); *Aseman* (30 November 2013); *Mosallas 261* (May 2015). Center row: *Andishe pouya 27* (June/July 2015); *Bavar* (March 2018); *Sazandegi 323* (8 March 2019). Bottom row: *Ebtekar* (15 July 2015); *Tavaana* (7 August 2019).

Nevertheless, these fringe parallels encountered either disregard or outright rejection from Mosaddeqists and various other political factions operating within Iran.⁴⁴

Analogical narratives centered on Mosaddeq were not universally accepted, as seen in the instances mentioned above. They were often conflicting and firmly rooted in distinct political agendas and ideological frameworks, triggering scrutiny and opposition from those who deemed

⁴⁴ Mohammad Taheri - Emili Emra’i, “Mobahesa Kimiyavi va Ghanninejad: Mosaddeq Populist Bud?” *Salname-ye Tejarat-e Farda*, 21 March 2015. <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/4989/%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AB%D9%87-%DA%A9%DB%8C%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%BA%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D9%BE%D9%88%D9%BE%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF->. Mohammad Quchani, “Mosaddeq Chera va Chegune Khodkoshi Siyasi Kard?” *Sazandegi*, 6 March 2020. <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/6595/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%DA%86%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%88-%DA%86%DA%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF->.

them inaccurate or politically motivated. Nevertheless, they persisted during President Hassan Rouhani's tenure (r. 2013–21). The most prominent analogy during his presidency drew a comparison between Mosaddeq and Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister and chief nuclear negotiator. The analogy drew parallels between two situations: the nationalization of the oil industry by Mosaddeq and the contemporary right to a peaceful nuclear program, emphasizing similarities in the principles of sovereignty and national rights (Fig. 1).⁴⁵

In the aftermath of the extensive negotiations and signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna in 2015, slogans such as “Zarif is the Mosaddeq of our era” (Zarif, Mosaddeq *‘asr-e ma ast*), symbolized a beacon of hope and transformation. This analogy resonated among many Iranians, who perceived the JCPOA as a potential turning point in their nation's global relations, accompanied by the upcoming relief of international economic sanctions. The symbolism surrounding Mosaddeq resurfaced with vigor when Iranians took to the streets in jubilant celebration, prominently displaying portraits featuring Zarif alongside Mosaddeq.⁴⁶

Reformist media outlets enthusiastically embraced Zarif as a national hero, often presenting a composite image of him next to Mosaddeq to convey a compelling message of safeguarding national interests against foreign encroachments.⁴⁷ However, since the finalization of the nuclear agreement, Rouhani's government has become a target of conservatives' criticism in both parliament and the media. The latter did not hide their discontent, arguing that during the two years of negotiations with the six major world powers, the government made excessive concessions to the international community without securing adequate guarantees in return.⁴⁸

The deal's failure to yield substantial economic advantages and the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA in 2018 severely eroded Zarif's credibility and undermined his standing. Whereas the initial analogy, following the ceremonial signing in Vienna, emphasized his international achievements as akin to the nationalization of the oil industry, the subsequent comparison drew parallels between Zarif and the post-coup Mosaddeq, highlighting the perceived failure of his political strategies. Conservatives seized the opportunity to lash out against Rouhani's government and vehemently argue against placing trust in the United States. This sentiment found resonance both in social media discussions and official channels of the Iranian state, where hashtags like #unreliable_usa and “the tragedy of trust in America” (#*trajedi e'temad beh amrica*) along with accompanying visual representations gained prominence.⁴⁹

In response to the imminent collapse of the JCPOA, President Rouhani addressed the criticism of his government by accentuating Iran's ongoing legal disputes with the US. In one case, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Washington was obligated by pre-revolutionary agreements to lift certain sanctions affecting humanitarian goods for Iran. In

⁴⁵ “Raftar-e Qabel-e Ta'ammol-e Zarif va Eslahtalaban,” *Hamiyan-e Velayat*, 1 August 2020. <http://hamiyanvelayat.ir/fa/news-details/192243/%D9%BE%D8%B1%D9%88%DA%98%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82%E2%80%8C-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B8%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%DA%A9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%9F%7C-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7-%DA%86%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%9F-%7C%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1/>

⁴⁶ For the picture, see Clyde Hughes, “Iran's Foreign Minister Resigns Abruptly after Visit from Syrian Leader,” *United Press International*, 26 February 2019.

⁴⁷ Hossein Payandeh, “Tavafoq-e Hasteh'i va Astureh'i Shodan Shakhsiyat-e Mohammad Javad Zarif (part 3),” Hossein Payandeh Blog, 22 October 2015. <http://hosseinpandeh.blogfa.com/post/178>.

⁴⁸ “Zarif Firestorm over Iran's Failure to Compromise,” *Iran Primer*, 7 June 2023, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/jun/07/zarif-firestorm-over-irans-failure-compromise>.

⁴⁹ “Vakonesh-e Karbaran-e Twitter be Tajrobeh-ye E'temad be Amrika,” *Mashreq News*, 19 August 2018. <https://www.mashreqnews.ir/news/885471/%D9%88%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B4-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1/>

another case, the ICJ found jurisdiction to consider part of Iran's application concerning the freeze of its assets by the US.⁵⁰ During a deliberation session with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2019, Rouhani remarked, "The recent legal victories against the US in The Hague were greater than Dr. Mosaddeq's success."⁵¹ Rouhani was referring to 1952 when Mosaddeq attended the ICJ following an appeal initiated by the British government concerning Iran's oil industry nationalization. At that time, the court adjudged itself lacking jurisdiction.⁵² The comparison intended to highlight the significance of recent achievements, indirectly praising the Rouhani administration's accomplishments while implicitly contrasting them with the perceived shortcomings of the JCPOA.

Contextualizing the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the 1953 coup within a wider political landscape underscores the enduring significance of Mosaddeq's legacy, which continues to serve as a touchstone for various political factions to justify their actions, critique their rivals, and shape public opinion. As the 2023 anniversary unfolded against the backdrop of the Women, Life, Freedom protests, it resonated deeply in contemporary political discussions, especially among reformist factions. In an opinion article originally published in the reformist newspaper *Hammihan* (Compatriots), Mosaddeq's unwavering determination and his reluctance to compromise or engage with various political forces and social groups were addressed. The article attributed a quote to Bazargan, Iran's first postrevolution prime minister, stating, "The 28 Mordad coup came to the rescue of the national movement and Dr. Mosaddeq's government; otherwise, the entire honor of the movement would have been lost!" This perspective suggests that Mosaddeq, instead of disrupting domestic power dynamics, potentially could have played a role in preserving political diversity and pluralism. In light of this interpretation, reformists called upon the conservative clerical elite within the regime to heed the lessons of history and avoid repeating past mistakes.⁵³

In summation, the study of Mosaddeq's memorialization in contemporary Iranian politics reveals a multifaceted and dynamic landscape in which history, collective memory, and political discourse intersect. His legacy serves as a lens through which modern political actors and events are analyzed, showcasing the adaptable nature of collective memory and its manipulations. The politics of memory in Iran strategically utilize various elements, including locations, events, and individuals, to construct narratives and shape public perception. Ahmadabad, Mosaddeq's resting place, has become almost a symbolic Karbala for Iranian nationalists and Mosaddeqists, signifying struggle and sacrifice. Historical events, such as the nationalization of Iran's oil industry and the 1953 coup, are employed to draw parallels with contemporary developments, emphasizing the continuity of certain ideals and struggles. In this intricate interplay of memory and politics, Mosaddeq's legacy remains a potent force, reminding us of the enduring impact of history on the collective consciousness of a nation and its ability to shape the narratives and aspirations of the present.

⁵⁰ Mike Corder, "UN Court Orders US to Lift Some Iran Sanctions," *AP News*, 3 October 2018; "Certain Iranian Assets," International Court of Justice, doc. 164-20190213-PRE-01-00-EN, 13 February 2019; Keian Razipour, "After ICJ's 'Certain Iranian Assets' Judgment, Iran and United States Both Claim Victory," *Just Security*, 17 April 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/85982/after-icjs-certain-iranian-assets-judgment-iran-and-united-states-both-claim-victory>.

⁵¹ "President in a Meeting with Foreign Minister, Deputies, Senior Managers: Foreign Policy Closely Tied to National Integrity," Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 August 2019, <https://en.mfa.gov.ir/portal/NewsView/48280>.

⁵² Sam Sasan Shoamanesh, "Iran's George Washington: Remembering and Preserving the Legacy of 1953," *MIT International Review* (2009).

⁵³ Retrieved from "Sahm-e Mosaddeq az Kudata-ye 28 Mordad," *Aftab News*, 3 May 2023. <https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/828082/%D8%B3%D9%87%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AA%D8%A7%DB%8C-%DB%B2%DB%B8-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF>.