

SHALOM

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Pankaj Mishra on Iran:



Why Weren't They Grateful?

plus

- *Stefan Merken: Options*
- *Gershon Baskin: Denial Is No Solution*
- *Murray Polner: Miko Peled, the General's Son*



A Happy, Healthy,

& Peaceful New Year

From Jewish Peace Fellowship

Stefan Merken

From Where I Sit

THE JPF NEVER TAKES SIDES IN ELECTIONS, AND SO I speak here only for myself as an American Jew.

When Mitt Romney told a group of very wealthy visiting American Jews in Israel that, should he be elected, the US would use “any and all measures” to protect Israel from Iran, he used a deliberately ambiguous theme. But what, precisely, does the phrase mean? He also stated that “no option should be excluded” when dealing with Iran. He is not the only American politician of either party to threaten Iran with retaliation should it attack Israel; but it left me confused. Was he really trying to influence Jewish voters back home? Was he trying to convince the larger American public that he had a solid grasp of Middle East issues? Or was he perhaps directing his comments only to those who stand solidly behind any and all Israeli policies?

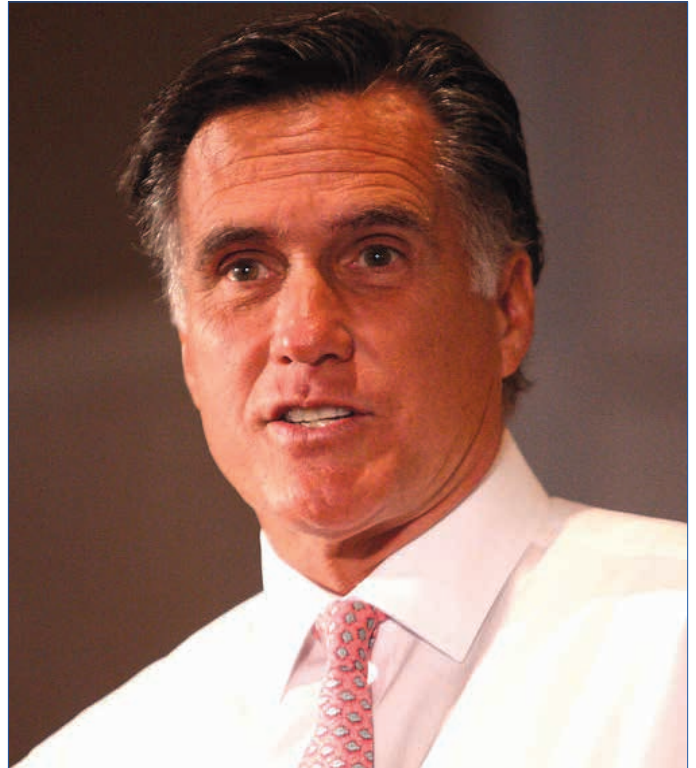
Whatever he hoped to accomplish, his central theme sent chills up my spine: Are we talking about a war with Iran?

Unstated was the fact that “any and all measures” could very well include nuclear weapons and resulting massive casualties and utter disruptions in the Middle East and elsewhere. Unstated, too, was that Israeli intelligence experts, not to mention Pentagon and US intelligence officials, have questioned the unproven assertions that Iran is on the way to developing a bomb, and that a nuclear-armed Iran would attack Israel or the US in the face of near-certain massive retaliation that would assume cataclysmic proportions?

Most troublingly, Romney said: “We must not delude ourselves into thinking that containment is an option.”

There seemed to be no middle ground. Just a straight

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Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney on Iran’s Nuclear Development: “We must not delude ourselves into thinking that containment is an option.”

line aimed at Tehran. Granted he might have been more concerned with the rich donors to his campaign. But whatever the reason, war with Iran is not something that should be taken lightly by anyone, especially in Iran, Israel and the US. “Any and all measures” threatens everyone of us. ☆

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Gershon Baskin

Denial Is No Solution



I RECENTLY MET AN AMERICAN JEWISH LAWYER WHO visits Israel frequently. She is a strong supporter of our country, and a proud Zionist. She has been on the liberal side of American politics her whole life, like most American Jews.

She fought for civil rights in the 1960s. She was against the war in Vietnam. She was proud of Israel in 1967, worried in 1973, confused by the first Lebanon war, dismayed by Israel's continued presence in Lebanon for eighteen years.

She saw the first intifada as the birthing ground for a peace process with the Palestinians, based on mutual recognition. She was inspired and hopeful when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn in 1993. She was devastated when Rabin was assassinated. She continued to believe in peace and was convinced that the

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two-state solution was the best way to fulfill Zionism's dream of a sustainable Jewish nation-state in the land of Israel.

Now, she is challenged within her own Jewish community on the viability of a two-state solution and she finds herself becoming part of a rapidly shrinking group of American Jews who hold firm to the belief that it is the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Settlement leaders, writing in *The New York Times* and other local and international newspapers, tell us that there is no two-state solution and, they claim, there never was. They tell us that the Zionist dream is the fulfillment of the Jewish state in all of the land of Israel and make believe that there is no thing called the Palestinian people.

Every week "talkbackers" to my articles make the same claim. I still have not heard one of them — or any credible settler leader — explain to me how we make peace with our neighbors by implementing a one-state reality.

I have heard some of them say that peace is not in the cards. That is certainly true if we continue to implement the plans that they dictate to the country. They are right: there will be no peace if we deny the Palestinian people their right to self-determination. If we deny them their freedom — if we

continue to confiscate their land and build more settlements for Jews only — there will be no peace.

I've written that it seems to many that there is no conflict with the Palestinians, as if the Israeli-Palestinian clash has evaporated. We are really good at it. We have created magical mystery paths of legal wizardry to confiscate land which is not ours.

We have mastered the art of counterfeiting bills of sale and land registration certificates. We even bring people back from the dead to sign documents allowing us to take their land. We have created committees of legal experts who, with a dose of salt and pepper and a magic wand, can make the occupation disappear.

We have produced demographers who don't need censuses to create facts and who have the amazing ability to add hundreds of thousands of Jews in place of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and presto, there is no "demographic problem."

The only thing they haven't gotten down to yet is figuring out how to make those Arabs in Judea and Samaria really disappear. Those Arabs never do what they are supposed to do.

My American-Jewish lawyer friend searched me out because she was told by a common academic friend — another American Jew with a similar background who had just spent a number of weeks in Israel trying to determine if there remains any chance at all of still having a two-state solution — that Gershon Baskin is the only person left in the peace camp who is still optimistic that this can be achieved. Everyone else, he told her, is busy searching for other options.

I am guilty as charged, and I will try to explain why.

The first reason is that there is no other solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict except the two-state solution. Yes, there is a conflict and there is a Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation. If "solution" means the end of conflict, then there is only one solution. I want to be completely clear: I am not talking about states separated with "Berlin walls,"

but rather peace based on cooperation and, eventually, an open border. This must be the goal — a positive peace built on developing trust and normal relations.

Second, the physical realities on the ground, created by settler demands and consecutive governments' capitulation, are far less paralyzing than they appear to be. The built-up areas of the settlements (as opposed to their artificial statutory borders) amount to less than three percent of the West Bank. More than sixty percent of the West Bank is still uninhabited and undeveloped. That land is

under full Israeli control, but eventually, when it is given up by Israel in a peace deal, there is a lot of room available for building the Palestinian state.

Third, the key to moving forward toward peace is mainly in the hands of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This is the same man who surprised the nation by approving the prisoner exchange for Gilad Schalit against all of his previously held values and principles. He ruled in favor of another set of values and principles: the covenant between the people and the state that enables us to have a "peoples' army," the basic element of our social solidarity.

He faces a similar dilemma regarding peace with the Palestinians: either continue to settle the entire land, or have a Jewish state that is also democratic. The real Zionist choice is to compromise on the land in order to preserve the democratic Jewish nation-state.

He will find a real partner in Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad and the Palestinian people when he finally comes around to realize that he cannot have both the land and a democratic Jewish state.

I still have hopes that Netanyahu will come around to the right conclusion. Most of my readers, friend and foe alike, will say that I am dreaming. Perhaps. But my vision of two states for two peoples is closer to the true Zionist dream than any vision presented by settler leaders that denies the reality of two peoples living in this land and agreeing to do so under one flag (which is the Jewish flag). ✨

The real Zionist choice is to compromise on the land in order to preserve the democratic Jewish nation-state.

QuoteUnQuote

“THE ISRAELI CENTER is caught in a vicious cycle. It argues that it cannot make peace while there is violence, and when there is no violence it sees little reason to make peace.”

— **MATTI STEINBERG**, a former senior advisor to Israeli security chiefs, quoted by Nathan Thrall, of the International Crisis Group, in *The New York Times*, June 24, 2012.

Murray Polner

‘The Values I Thought We Held Dear’

JUST BY HAVING ALICE WALKER WRITE THE FOREWORD to this book you know immediately what approach Miko Peled will take in *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine* (Just World Books). It was Walker who recently refused to allow an Israeli book publisher to issue a Hebrew-language translation of her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Color Purple*. In doing so, she denounced the way Israel was treating Palestinians. In her statement withholding permission to publish her novel, she said, “I grew up under American apartheid and this [treatment of Palestinians] was far worse.”

Whether the reader agrees in whole, in part, or not at all, Miko Peled’s idealistic and searching memoir reflects at least partly those Jews everywhere who have grown increasingly disillusioned with the harsh Israeli occupation and continuing colonization of the West Bank. “How did we reach this point?” asked a troubled David Shulman in *The New York Review of Books*. (Shulman teaches at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is an activist in Ta’ayush/Arab-Jewish Partnership.) How indeed?

What Peled sets out to do is reintroduce Matti Peled, his father and a highly respected Israeli general, who became a fearless advocate for an end to the occupation and for establishing a viable and independent Palestinian nation. Miko, the son, tries hard, though not always successfully, to explain why his father — and his mother, whose own father was Abraham Katznelson, a legendary figure in Zionist history — dramatically changed his views and opposed Israel’s policies toward Palestinians.

Matti Peled was born in Haifa in 1923. He eventually served in the Israel Defense Forces and rose to the rank of general. Always a believer in Zionism as a national liberation movement, and still a hawk, in 1967 he played a crucial role in the Six-Day War, when Israel crushed Egypt. Indeed, for much of his earlier life he was oblivious to Palestinians who had lost their homes and lands. In fact, for a while he backed the US invasion of Vietnam, even visiting American forces there at the Pentagon’s request. At the time, bogged down in a dirty and unwinnable war, many in the US military tended to think of the Israelis as superwarriors.

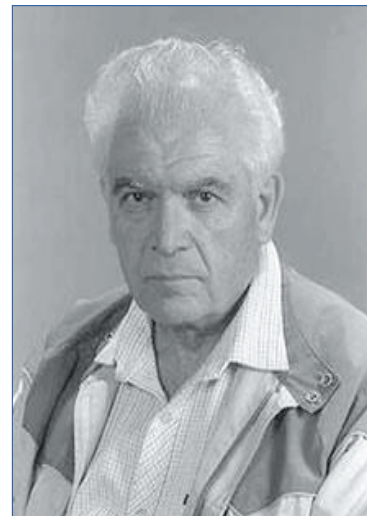
Miko thinks his father’s brief tenure as military head of

Gaza in the 1950s might have begun his transformation. There, in that deeply troubled, teeming speck of territory now governed by the democratically-elected Hamas, he was taken aback by the absolute power he held over a people whose language he could not speak and of whose culture he was ignorant. So he then set out to learn Arabic and later became professor of Arabic literature at Tel Aviv University, earned a PhD at UCLA, and wrote a dissertation about the gifted Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz.

Increasingly unconventional, genuinely interested in the intractable Israeli-Palestinian divide, he began supporting Israeli and Palestinian peace groups, working closely with Israeli peace people, such as Amos Kenan, Aryeh Eliav and Uri Avnery, and helped form Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace bloc still in existence. Along the way, together with Avnery and several non-Jews, he was elected to the Knesset under the flag of the Progressive List for Peace, which soon vanished, as do most small, sectarian Israeli parties.

Even so, Miko says he is always asked, “What made your father change?” He really can’t offer specific reasons though he points to some events he believes transformed his father from hawk to dove. Miko speculates that reported shootings of Palestinian civilians and torture of prisoners may have deeply disturbed his father. So it was no surprise that when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, the general urged Israeli soldiers not to participate; and he was deeply sympathetic to Yesh Gvul, an organization of Israeli soldiers who refused to fight what they believed to be a war of choice rather than defense, a position soon taken by hundreds of thousands of protesting antiwar Israelis in Tel Aviv.

Miko also recalls his father’s speech at a synagogue in San Francisco when he urged the US to stop peddling Israel weapons since they were being used against Palestinians.



Father: Matti Peled

MURRAY POLNER is co-editor of SHALOM.

Above all, he wanted the US to end its annual gift of billions. "Receiving free money, money you have not earned and for which you do not have to work, is plain and simply corrupting."

In 1997, two years after the general died, his thirteen-year-old granddaughter, Smadar, Miko's older sister's child, was murdered by a Palestinian suicide bomber on a Jerusalem street. The resulting shock led some family members, especially Smadar's father, Miko's brother-in-law and close friend, to condemn Palestinian terror. Others in their circle wondered whether any cause, however justifiable, was worth the death of a child. A grieving Miko, an IDF veteran, was then, as now, living in San Diego with his wife, where he was teaching judo, and their life in escapist southern California "did not include any Israeli or even American-Jewish friends."

He sought consolation after the murdered child's parents encountered the Orthodox Israeli Itzhak Frankenthal. Miko's brother-in-law described his first sight of him: "a large and impressive man with a knitted *kippah* [skullcap] on his head." Frankenthal's son had been killed by Hamas thugs in 1974. Frankenthal visited Smadar's home during shiva, the Jewish ritual for the dead, leaving her father deeply upset. To Frankenthal he protested, "How dare you walk into the home of someone who just lost a child and talk about peace and reconciliation? Where do you get the nerve to do that?" Frankenthal said he only had come to invite the brokenhearted parents to meetings of his Bereaved Families Forum, comprised of Palestinian and Jewish families who had lost their children in the endless violence yet still believed in peace and reconciliation. In distant San Diego, eager to find an outlet for his own grief, Miko organized the Wheelchair Foundation which offers free wheelchairs to Israelis and Palestinians victimized by the mutual bloodshed.

Even so, visiting Israel fairly regularly he found many unsympathetic to his dovish views. He had turned against the notion of two independent states existing side by side, instead supporting a single state with all citizens equal. This was a distant echo of the past, as when Judah Magnes, the



Son: Miko Peled at Israel's security wall/separation barrier, September 2008

first chancellor of the Hebrew University; Martin Buber, the eminent philosopher, and other Zionists had urged the same approach in the 1930s, an stance which then and now is dismissed by most Jews and Palestinians.

On the West Bank, Miko, now an outright proponent of Palestinian rights, visited Bil'in, an Arab village which for years has opposed the occupation without violence. He supports sanctions and boycotts against Israel. He urges young Israelis to refuse to serve, which most youngsters, even liberal-minded ones uneasy about the way Palestinians are treated, find hard to contemplate, let alone practice. He quotes one sharp question directed at him: "Are you suggesting that we refuse to serve in the same army that your father helped to build? The first Jewish armed force to protect Jews in over two thousand years?"

Undeterred, he is outraged when he contemplates rationalizations that justify the killing of Palestinian civilians but condemn the killing of Israeli civilians. "Struggling to end the segregation and create a secular democracy where two nations live as equals, while difficult, is not naïve, nor is it utopian," he insists, though he must surely recognize this will be unattainable for a long time, if ever. All the same, echoing his late father and mother, he asks: "How did Israelis turn away so completely from the values I thought we all held dear?" ✧

Pankaj Mishra

Why Weren't They Grateful?

IN 1890, AN ITINERANT MUSLIM ACTIVIST NAMED Jamal al-din al-Afghani was in Iran when its then ruler, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, granted a tobacco concession to a British businessman named G.F. Talbot, effectively granting him a monopoly on its purchase, sale and export. Al-Afghani pointed out, to a chorus of approval from secular-minded intellectuals as well as conservative merchants, that tobacco growers would now be at the mercy of infidels, and the livelihoods of small *dealers* destroyed. He set up pressure groups in Tehran — a political innovation in the country — which sent anonymous letters to officials and distributed leaflets and placards calling on Iranians to revolt. Angry protests erupted in major cities the following spring. Helped by the recently introduced telegraph, the mass demonstrations of the Tobacco Protest, as it came to be called, were as carefully coordinated as they would be in Khomeini's Islamic Revolution a hundred years later, when cassette tapes played a similar role and women participated in large numbers.

Muhammad Mossadegh, who was ousted by a British MI5 and CIA plot in 1954, was at the time the precocious nine-year-old son of a high official working for the shah. Homa Katouzian, his previous biographer in English, ascribes his consistent opposition to “any concession to any foreign power” to this early impression of popular anger at European encroachments on Iran's sovereignty. Mossadegh, whose family belonged to the nobility and who was honored as a child with the title *mussadiq al-saltaneh*, “certifier of the monarchy,” was an unlikely leader of Iran's transition from dynastic monarchy to mass politics. But then he grew up during a period of unprecedented political ferment across Asia.

Asian intellectuals and activists had begun to challenge the arbitrary power of Western imperialists and their native allies in the late nineteenth century. The first generation

PANKAJ MISHRA's most recent book is *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. This essay appeared in the *London Review of Books* and is reprinted with its permission.



1951: Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh of Iran waves as he leaves Union Station for the Iranian Embassy in Washington D.C.

obtained polemicists like al-Afghani, who gathered energetic but disorganized young anti-imperialists around him in Kabul, Istanbul, Cairo and Tehran. The next generation produced men like Mossadegh, who had been exposed to Western ways or trained in Western-style institutions and were better equipped to provide their increasingly restless compatriots with a coherent ideology and politics of anticolonial nationalism.

In Christopher de Bellaigue's politically astute biography, *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Very British Coup* (Harper, 2012; published with a different US subtitle: “Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup”), Mossadegh is not the “dizzy old wizard” and “tantrum-throwing Scheherazade” of countless Anglo-American memoirs and press reports, but a member of “that generation of Western-educated Asians who returned home, primly mustachioed, to sell freedom to their compatriots.” “Beholden to the same mistress, *la Patrie*, these Turks, Arabs, Persians and Indians went on to lead the anticolonial

movements that transformed the map of the world.”

Mossadegh was more democratically minded than Atatürk, for example: de Bellaigue calls him the “first liberal leader of the modern Middle East” — his “conception of liberty was as sophisticated as any in Europe or America.” But he was less successful than his heroes, Gandhi and Nehru; he was nearly seventy, an elderly hypochondriac, by the time he became Iran’s prime minister in 1951. It was his misfortune to be a liberal democrat at a time when, as Nehru remarked, looking on as British gunboats directed the course of Egyptian politics, “democracy for an Eastern country seems to mean only one thing: to carry out the behests of the imperialist ruling power.”

Though more focused and resourceful than al-Afghani, secular-minded moderates like Mossadegh were often easy victims of imperialist skullduggery. They never had more than a few token allies in the West and at home were despised by the hardliners, who later assumed the postcolonial task of building up national dignity and strength. Khomeini, for one, always spoke contemptuously of Mossadegh’s failure to protect Iran from the West.

Both liberal and radical Iranians could cite instances of the country’s humiliation by the West in the nineteenth century, when it had been dominated by the British and the Russians. The events of the early twentieth century further undermined its political autonomy at a time when its political institutions were being liberalized (a parliament had been established as a result of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-7). In the First World War, Britain and Russia first occupied and then divided the country in order to keep the Ottoman-German armies at bay. The end of the war brought no respite. The Red Army threatened from the north and Britain, already parceling out the Ottoman Empire’s territories, saw an opportunity to annex Iran. Lord Curzon, now foreign secretary and convinced, as Harold Nicolson put it, that “God had personally selected the British upper class as an instrument of the Divine Will,” drew up an Anglo-Persian agreement which was almost entirely destructive of Iranian sovereignty.

Mossadegh is said to have wept when he heard about the agreement. In despair he resolved to spend the rest of his life in Europe. As it turned out, Curzon, never an accurate reader of the native pulse, had misjudged the Iranian mood. The agreement was denounced; pro-British members of the Majlis, the Iranian parliament, were physically attacked.



Sir George Nathaniel Curzon, The Lord Curzon of Kedleston, KG, GCSI, GCIE, PC: “These people have got to be taught at whatever cost to them that they cannot get on without us. I don’t at all mind their noses being rubbed in the dust.”

Facing such opposition, Curzon grew more obdurate: “These people have got to be taught at whatever cost to them that they cannot get on without us. I don’t at all mind their noses being rubbed in the dust.” Despite Curzon’s stubbornness, Iranian revulsion finally sank the Anglo-Persian agreement.

But another inequitable arrangement already bound Iran to Britain. Presciently buying government shares in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in 1913, Winston Churchill had managed to ensure that eighty-four percent of its profits came to Britain. In 1933, Reza Khan, a self-educated soldier who had made use of the postwar chaos to grab power and found a new ruling dynasty (much to Mossadegh’s disgust), negotiated a new agreement with APOC, which turned out to be remarkably like the old one. During the Second World War, British and Russian troops again occupied the country, and the British replaced the rashly pro-German shah with his son Muhammad Reza.

In these years, British policy was infused with what de Bellaigue calls, without exaggeration, “a profound

contempt for Persia and its people,” which provided the spark not only for modern Iranian nationalism but also for the seemingly irremovable suspicion of Britain as a “malignant force.” When in 1978 the shah called Khomeini a British agent, he intended it as a vicious slander; it backfired, triggering the first of the mass protests against him. APOC, renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1935, grossed profits of \$3 billion between 1913 and 1951, but only \$624 million of that remained in Iran. In 1947, the British government earned £15 million in tax on the company’s profits alone, while the Iranian government received only half that sum in royalties. The company also excluded Iranians from management and barred Tehran from inspecting its accounts.

Growing anti-British sentiment finally forced Muhammad Reza to appoint Mossadegh as prime minister early in 1951. The country’s nationalists by now included secularists as well as religious parties and the communist as well as non-communist left. Mossadegh, who, de Bellaigue writes, “was the first and only Iranian statesman to command all nationalist strains,” moved quickly to nationalize the oil industry. Tens of thousands lined the streets to cheer the officials sent from Tehran to take over the British oil facilities in Abadan, kissing the dust-caked cars — one of which belonged to Mehdi Bazargan, who would later become the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The American ambassador reported that Mossadegh was backed

by ninety-five percent of the population, and the shah told the visiting diplomat Averell Harriman that he dared not say a word in public against the nationalization. Mossadegh felt himself to be carried along on the wings of history. “Hundreds of millions of Asian people, after centuries of colonial exploitation, have now gained their independence and freedom,” he said at the UN in October 1951: Europeans had acknowledged Indian, Indonesian and Pakistani claims to sovereignty and national dignity — why did they continue to ignore Iran?

He was supported by a broad coalition of new Asian countries. Even the delegate from Taiwan, which had been given its seat in the UN at the expense of Mao’s People’s Republic of China, reminded the British that “the day has passed when the control of the Iranian oil industry can be shared with foreign companies.” Other postcolonial regimes would soon nationalize their oil industries, thereby acquiring control of international prices and exposing Western economies to severe shocks. But the British, enraged by Mossadegh’s impertinence and desperately needing the revenues from what was Britain’s biggest single overseas investment, wouldn’t listen.

Britain could no longer afford its empire but, as de Bellaigue points out, in many places, “particularly in Iran, red-faced men went around in tailcoats as if nothing had changed.” Many of them were on the board of directors of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company — and, as one of them confessed, were “helpless, niggling, without an idea between them, confused, hide-bound, small-minded, blind.” Still believing it “had done the Iranians a huge favor by finding and extracting oil,” Britain rejected a proposal, backed by the US, that the profits should be shared equally, and launched a devastatingly effective blockade of the Iranian economy. “If we bow to Tehran, we bow to Baghdad later,” as the daily newspaper *Express* put it with Curzonian logic.

Churchill’s return to Downing Street in 1951 further emboldened the neo-imperialists: the *Daily Mail* exhorted the government to “do something before the rot spreads further.” An anti-Mossadegh consensus rapidly built up, even among liberals. In 1891, al-Afghani had challenged Reuter’s depiction of Iranians fighting for sovereignty as religious zealots, wondering if it had some connection with Britain’s commercial stake in Iran. In 1951, David Astor’s *Observer* was no less protective of British interests when it described Mossadegh as a “fanatic” and a “tragic Frankenstein ... obsessed with one xenophobic idea.”

“There was disquiet across the white world,” de Bellaigue writes, at Mossadegh’s “show of Oriental bad form.” The Foreign Office started a campaign to persuade the American public of the rightness of the British cause and the US press duly fell in with it. *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* compared Mossadegh to Hitler, even though his occasionally authoritarian populism had to contend with a fractious parliament and a growing internal opposition composed of merchants, landowners, royalists, the military and right-wing clerics (some of these would give the adventurers of the CIA and MI6 their opening). In *The US Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and the Journalism of Deference* (1988), William Dorman and Mansour Farhang show that no major American newspaper had ever spelled out Iran’s grievances against the AIOC. Rather, *The Washington Post* claimed that the people of Iran were not capable of being “grateful.” Looking back remorsefully, *The New York Times* correspondent in Tehran, Kennett Love, later described Mossadegh as a “reasonable man” acting under “unreasonable pressures.” But Love himself was subtly coerced into going along with what he called his “obtuse establishment” editors in New York, and into collaborating with the US Embassy.

Having proclaimed the “American Century,” Henry Luce’s

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Time took a particular interest in commodity-rich Iran, arguing that the “Russians may intervene, grab the oil, even unleash World War Three.” Already determined to overthrow Mossadegh, the British did not take long to exploit the growing American obsession with Soviet expansionism: Iran was to provide a test run on how to taint Asian nationalism by associating it with communism. They found a receptive audience in the Dulles brothers, John Foster and Allen, the secretary of state and the head of the CIA, respectively, in Eisenhower’s new administration in 1953.

Drawing on Persian sources, de Bellaigue gives an authoritative account of Operation Ajax, the CIA/ MI6 coup that toppled Mossadegh’s government and established Shah Reza Pahlavi as Iran’s unchallenged ruler in August 1953. The story of the Anglo-American destruction of Iran’s hopes of establishing a liberal modern state has been told many times, but the cautionary message of 1953 is still far from being absorbed. As early as 1964, Richard Cottam, a political officer in the US Embassy in the 1950s and later an Iran scholar, warned that the press and academic “distortions” of the Mossadegh era bordered on the “grotesque, and until that era is seen in truer perspective there can be little hope for a sophisticated US foreign policy concerning Iran.” (Or the whole Middle East, Cottam could have added.) *The New York Times* summed up the new imperial mood immediately after the coup: “Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism.”

Despite being told of it several times by Kennett Love, the *Times* declined to mention the CIA’s central role in Mossadegh’s overthrow — it was the then-unknown agency’s first major operation of the Cold War. Welcoming the shah on his visit to the United States in 1954, the *Times* exulted: “Today Mossadegh is where he belongs — in jail. Oil is flowing again into the free markets of the world.” Iran, it added, was moving “toward new and auspicious horizons.” The American press, which had been denouncing Mossadegh as the Iranian “Führer,” was now applauding the shah’s pharaonic modernization schemes. This was at least in part



Father and Son: Muhammad Reza Shah and crown prince Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, September 1941

a result of his hospitality to American media eminences, which, according to a list released by the revolutionaries in 1979, included Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings.

Emboldened by this support, the previously timid shah manifested signs of the syndrome al-Afghani had identified in one of his predecessors: “However bizarre it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact, that after each visit of the shah to Europe, he has increased in tyranny over his people.” Certainly, the American press had little time

for the views of ordinary Iranians, for whom, de Bellaigue points out, the US in 1953 had become “almost overnight” the “shah’s accomplice in injustice and oppression.” American companies had been given a forty percent share of oil production after Mossadegh’s overthrow, and by the early 1960s Iranian intellectuals, many of them forced into exile, had begun to examine how it was, as Jalal al-e Ahmad wrote in *Gharbzadegi* (imperfectly translated as *Weststruckness*), that they had been completely ignored while other people “moved in and out of our midst and we awoke to find every oil derrick a spike impaling the land.”

Iranian hostility to the US grew, as the CIA did business with the executioners and torturers of the shah’s secret police. Finally erupting in 1979, it shocked American policymakers and opinion-formers, who sought to find an interpretation of current events through readings in “Islam,” as they would after 9/11. They were in no position to understand that, as with the Tobacco Protest of 1891 and the nationalist upsurge behind Mossadegh, a broad Iranian coalition had ranged itself against the shah and his foreign allies. Indeed, in the early days of the revolution, Mossadeghists like Bazargan looked just as strong as their socialist and Islamist allies. It was Jimmy Carter’s offer of asylum to the shah in 1979, and the retaliatory storming of the American Embassy in Tehran, that tipped the balance in favor of the Islamist revolutionaries.

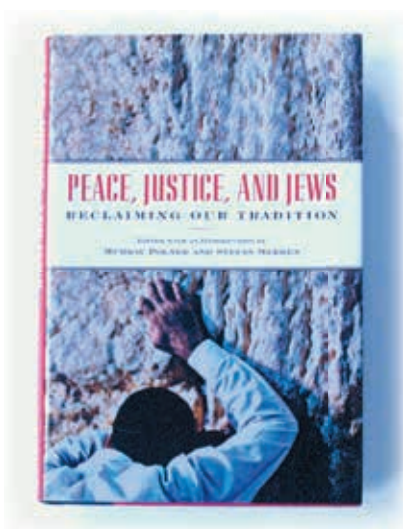
Saddam Hussein’s brutal eight-year-long assault on Iran, cynically assisted by the US, entrenched the Islamic Republicans while burnishing the popular image of the Great Satan. Always under pressure, the liberalizing reformers around Mohammad Khatami were further weakened by George W. Bush’s abrupt inclusion of Iran in his “axis of

evil.” Since then, America’s invasions and occupations of Iran’s neighbors have confirmed Iran’s perception of the West as clumsily inept as well as guilty of what Khomeini called *istikbar i jahani* (“global arrogance”).

War between Iran and the US has never seemed more likely than in recent months, as American politicians and journalists dutifully endorse Benjamin Netanyahu’s bluster. There is little sign in the mainstream press here or in the US that anyone is paying attention to de Bellaigue and other knowledgeable writers on Iran. A recent *Guardian* review of de Bellaigue’s book claimed that the shah “brought to Iran a prosperity, security and prestige unknown since the seventeenth century.” Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an opportunistic tub-thumper whose support is dwindling and who suffers the supreme leader’s disapprobation, is routinely portrayed as the next Hitler.

Meanwhile liberal opinion ignores the effects that sanctions have on ordinary citizens, just as they did in the 1950s, and governments choose not to see that they offer a

lifeline to a semidiscredited regime by radically shrinking the possibilities for any political or economic change — which is why the Green Movement strongly opposes them. The Iranian clerics may now linger on, like the Cuban revolutionaries, kept going by an American embargo. But Iranians can see more vividly the hypocrisy of America’s mollicoddling of Israel, the one country in the Middle East that is armed with nuclear weapons. They know, too, that the US made a nuclear deal with India as recently as 2005. Support for Iran’s right to pursue its nuclear program cuts across the country’s political divisions. Aspiring regime-changers in the West remain blind to the undiminished potency of Iranian nationalism. More bizarrely and dangerously, they ignore the hardening attitudes of the country’s ruling class after a century of humiliation by the West. “We are not liberals like Allende and Mossadegh, whom the CIA can snuff out,” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, now Iran’s supreme leader, warned during the hostage crisis in 1979. So far he has been proved right. ✧



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