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The Role of Foreign Intelligence Agencies in Cold War Coups d'État: A Comparative Case Study of Iran and Afghanistan

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Universiteit Leiden

The role of foreign intelligence agencies in Cold War coups d'état: a comparative case study of Iran and Afghanistan

A Thesis Submitted to The Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University in
fulfilment of the requirements for The Degree of Master of Arts in
International Relations (Global Order in Historical Perspective)

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ABSTRACT

Intelligence agencies have been traditionally depicted as rogue elements within the state apparatus. In this thesis, I assess the validity of this alleged independent agency during the 'Golden Age' of covert operations: the Cold War. Throughout the said period, more subversive and clandestine activities became the norm instead of the erstwhile use of direct military force. The two most active Intelligence Agencies of the period, the CIA and the KGB were key actors in supporting and executing government overthrows mostly throughout the Third World.

The two case studies I will examine are the CIA coup against the Mohammed Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953 and the KGB overthrow of Hafizullah Amin in Afghanistan in 1979. However, my concern is not only the agencies' role in carrying out the coups d'état but how they influenced the decision-making process within their foreign policy making bodies (the US National Security Council and the Soviet Politburo) to make these coups happen in the first place. By using the Bureaucratic Politics paradigm and other theoretical tools regarding the execution of coups d'état I underline how these intelligence agencies not only carried them but also were the main agents provocateurs behind the decision to intervene.

Keywords: Cold War History, Clandestine Operations, CIA, KGB, Iran, Afghanistan, Bureaucratic Politics,

ABBREVIATIONS

AIOC: Anglo-Iranian Oil Company

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union

DCI: Director of Central Intelligence

DRA: Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

EXCOMM: Executive Committee of the National Security Council

FSB: Federal Security Service (Russian)

KGB: Committee For State Security (Russian)

NSC: National Security Council

OSS: Office of Strategic Services

RGANI: Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (Russian)

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A coup d'état can be defined as an extralegal transfer of power that affirms traditional social and political power structures and occurs without major contributions from violence or popular will.¹

Government overthrows have been relevant throughout modern history and their emergence is interrelated with the establishment of the organized state apparatus and bureaucratic machinery. Their frequency and relevance soared during the Cold War, a period during which direct confrontation was out of the question and the balance of terror between the two superpowers led to a new modus operandi for global influence: military intervention gave its place to more clandestine operations organized by intelligence agencies which aimed to the instilment of a new regime, friendlier to the intervening country. The nature of such interventions allowed the plausible deniability of the agents. And while such actions might be carried out by intelligence agencies under governmental orders, if we consider the bureaucratic politics approach, the different agencies that make up the state apparatus are not one monolithic group but an 'arena' of groups with competing interests and agendas. In other words, decision making is influenced by different centers of power within the state apparatus and made decisions are a compromise among the bargaining parties.

By considering two major coups that occurred during the 20th century bipolar confrontation, I will attempt to underline the role of the intelligence agencies in these violent transitions of power as autonomous actors within their respective international and internal system.

¹ Ishiyama, John T., and Marijke Breuning. 2011. 21st century political science: a reference handbook. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications. Ishiyama, J. T., & Breuning, M. (2011). 21st century political science: A reference handbook. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications. Page. 126-127

1.1 Literature Review

The Cold-War, the half century-long ideological and political confrontation between the West and the East, saw the two superpowers and their respective intelligence agencies in an undeclared and hidden war to assert their global position. These are the two main actors that will be examined throughout this dissertation: on the one hand the CIA which defines itself as ‘a U.S. government agency that provides objective intelligence on foreign countries and global issues to the president, the National Security Council, and other policymakers to help them make national security decisions’². On the other: the KGB, (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti) or Committee for the Security of the State with a wide array of tasks that ranged from foreign intelligence to domestic surveillance. Both agencies employed a wide array of tactics throughout the Cold War and this paper emphasizes on the practice of regime changes. The most well-known work that encompasses a theoretical framework of Coup d’états has been written by historian Edward Luttwak. The title of the book speaks for itself; ‘*Coup d’État: A Practical Handbook*’ demonstrates the history, planning, strategy, and execution of regime changes. However, the book does not consider the role of intelligence agencies as potential initiators of such activities and focuses on the traditional popular-military overthrows. The prolific writer features intelligence agencies as integral cogs of the state machine and for the case of the CIA claims that ‘*contrary to popular legend [...] the CIA has never been an excessively independent, let alone a rogue entity.*’³ Further bibliography has also presented a different methodological framework such as Singh who interprets the violent regime changes as Battles (an invasion from within) and Elections (garnering popular support)⁴. And whereas the more underlying causes of a coup are being examined and two case studies are being juxtaposed, there is no proper reference to exterior agents such as foreign

² Website of the Central Intelligence Agency: <https://www.cia.gov/about/> (Accessed on November 11, 2021)

³Edward N. Luttwak. 2016. *Coup D’État : A Practical Handbook*, Revised Edition. Vol. Revised edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.p. 60-61

⁴ Singh, Naunihal. 2014. *Seizing power: the strategic logic of military coups..* Johns Hopkins University Press.

intelligence agencies. Another useful methodological tool is being provided by Powel and Thyne, who provide a thorough database of all coups that have taken place from 1950 to 2010 as well as categorize them by region and differentiate them from other anti-regime activities.⁵ More recently, the prevention of coups d'état under the light of civil-military relations has been tackled by De Bruin.⁶

It is this very autonomous role of the intelligence agencies that I seek to underline in this paper. The most efficient theory to consider when it comes to pinpointing the fragmented modus operandi of the state apparatus and the institution infighting within it is the 'Bureaucratic politics model' coined by Alison Graham. In his book '*Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (1971)*', the famous political scientist presents the bureaucratic model as a means of interpreting US foreign policy during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. This new approach to foreign policy analysis contradicted the pre-existing organizational-rational actor model and intended '*to outline a rough-cut framework for focusing primarily on the individuals within a government, and the interaction among them, as determinants of the actions of a government in international politics.*'⁷ And whereas the Central Intelligence Agency might not be a de jure part of the government apparatus in foreign policy decision making, its role as an intelligence provider and the main executive organ of covert operations makes the agent a protagonist in that field. Former secretary of Defense Gates reaffirms that position: '*the most significant role of the CIA is played out in the interaction between the intelligence community and the policymaking community. It is in the dynamics of this relationship that the influence and role of the CIA are determined*'⁸. The theory has also been tackled by more contemporary IR scholars with the more relevant amongst them being Jones' own approach to bureaucratic politics which is accompanied by a set of hypotheses regarding foreign policy decision-making process:

-Actors' policy preferences can be predicted from their position within the government.

⁵Powell, Jonathan M, and Clayton L Thyne. "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 2 (2011): 249–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29777507..>

⁶ De Bruin, Erica. 2021. *How to prevent coups d'état: counterbalancing and regime survival*. . Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁷Allison, Graham T. & Halperin, Morton H. 1972. «Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications». *World Politics* 24 (S1): 40–79. doi:10.2307/2010559.

⁸ Gates, Robert M. "The CIA and American Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 2 (1987): 215–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043370>.

-The stronger the actor's bargaining advantages, the greater the degree of his/her influence in the foreign policy-making process. (Bargaining advantages are activated through action channels, which provide the forum for government action and decision in foreign policy.)

-The greater the prevalence of political pulling and hauling among actors, the greater the likelihood of the final decision outcome being an example of a political resultant or compromise.⁹

The bureaucratic approach has also been employed in a wide array of relevant publications as a means to interpret foreign policy actions of state actors such the United States (Deployment of the ABM system¹⁰, Invasion of Iraq in 1990¹¹, troop surge in Afghanistan)¹² the Soviet Union (The Invasion of Czechoslovakia¹³) and Turkey (Caspian Sea Oil Pipeline).¹⁴

The assumed autonomy of intelligence agencies will be examined via two case studies, two government overthrows that were carried out by the CIA and the KGB respectively. In 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency in cooperation with the British Secret Intelligence Service executed an overthrow of the democratically elected Mossadegh government in retaliation to the 1951 nationalization of the country's oil industry (previously controlled by the AIOC Anglo-Iranian Oil Company). A considerable amount of primary and secondary bibliography is already suggesting how the CIA advocated and actively supported a regime change in Tehran. In a 1953 Memorandum regarding the situation in Iran, CIA Director Allen Dulles warned President Eisenhower 'a steady decrease in the power and influence of the Western democracies and the

⁹ Hook, Steven W., and Christopher M. Jones. 2012. *Routledge handbook of American foreign policy*. New York : Routledge

¹⁰ Halperin, Morton H. 1972. «The Decision to Deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration». *World Politics* 25 (1): 62–95. doi:10.2307/2010431.

¹¹HOLLAND, LAUREN. "The U.S. Decision to Launch Operation Desert Storm: A Bureaucratic Politics Analysis." *Armed Forces & Society* 25, no. 2 (1999): 219–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45346295>.

¹² Marsh, Kevin. "Obama's Surge: A Bureaucratic Politics Analysis of the Decision to Order a Troop Surge in the Afghanistan War." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (2014): 265–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24910832>.

¹³Valenta, Jiri. "The Bureaucratic Politics Paradigm and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia." *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (1979): 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2150156>.

¹⁴ M. Fatih Tayfur, and Korel Göymen. "Decision Making in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Caspian Oil Pipeline Issue." *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 2 (2002): 101–22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284228>

building up of a situation where a Communist takeover is becoming more and more of a possibility'¹⁵. Later sources, however, contradict this statement and posit that the documentation reveals that policymakers in Washington lacked compelling evidence to support the 'communist specter' looming over Iran.¹⁶ And whereas, President Eisenhower was initially supportive of the Mossadegh government and even considered a big loan to the country, the Dulles Brothers (Allen being the director of the CIA and John Foster the Secretary of State) managed to convince him to greenlight the operation after a series of NSA meetings and misinformation spreading¹⁷. This autonomous decision making by CIA leadership was also reflected at an operational level: during the execution and the failure of the first attempt of the coup in August 15th, Washington requested that the operation be scrapped and that all agents leave Iran¹⁸. However, Kermit Roosevelt Jr. opted for an independent course of action which turned the military nature of the coup into a political one. The official historical documentation of the events by the CIA '*Zendebad, Shah!*' posits '*that the operation only succeeded because of Roosevelt and his quick decision*'.¹⁹ The authoritarian government that was instilled in its place under the Shah Reza Pahlavi would become the closest ally of the West until the 1979 Revolution.

In the same year, KGB special units infiltrated the Afghan capital, assassinated the General Secretary of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan Hafizullah Amin. His replacement by a loyal to Moscow puppet government would stay in power until the withdrawal of the soviet forces in 1989 and its violent removal from power by the Taliban in 1992. The KGB and in particular its Chairman and later Soviet Premier Andropov played a predominant role in promoting the idea to the rest of the Politburo and the rest of the higher ups in the Kremlin: In a meeting between Brezhnev's inner

¹⁵ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, eds. James C. Van Hook & Adam M. Howard. United States Government Publishing Office Washington 2017 Doc. 169 Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Dulles to President Eisenhower March 1953 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d169>

¹⁶ Mark J. Gasiorowski; U.S. Perceptions of the Communist Threat in Iran during the Mossadegh Era. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2019; 21 (3): 185-221. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00898

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Mokhtari, Fariborz. "Iran's 1953 Coup Revisited: Internal Dynamics versus External Intrigue." *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 3 (2008): 457-88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25482541>.

¹⁹ CIA History Staff, "Zendebad, Shah!: The Central Intelligence Agency and the Fall of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, August 1953," by Scott A. Koch, June 1998 (Reviewed for declassification in November 2017)

circle, Andropov advocated for intervention in Afghanistan with the justification of Amin's potential rapprochement with the West and the efforts of the CIA of the USA to creating a "new Great Ottoman Empire," which would have included the Southern republics of the USSR²⁰ Osterman also reaffirms that 'Yuri Andropov, was a major initiator of the decision to intervene, and that the organization's local representatives in Kabul prepared many of the reports that won a majority in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) leaders for the decision.'²¹

In a period where a high number of coups had been instrumented and executed by the aforementioned agencies one might question the reasons for focusing on these two particular cases. Firstly, the two countries present a significance not just historically but also in light of the contemporary geopolitical situation in Central Asia. It is almost ironic when examining things in retrospective that few decades after the successful government overthrows in the two countries, Iran is one of the biggest declared rivals of the West and the Taliban regime is anything but friendly towards Russia. The diplomatic shift in these countries can be traced back to the interventionism that has now been either confirmed or exposed. Secondly, they are both cases where the overthrow was successful. For that reason, there is a high interest in examining the similarities and differences between the two cases based on the framework provided by Luttwak and Singh. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the relatively recent nature of the examined events is connected with the availability of primary sources.

For the case of the CIA, things are simpler as the agency confirmed its involvement, 60 years after the coup with many of the official records and documents concerning the operation being declassified and available from the 2013 CIA Freedom of Information Act release²². Moreover, Donald Wilber, CIA agent and architect of operation AJAX (the plan to overthrow the Iranian government) has thoroughly narrated his experience with the coup in more than one books (Adventures in the Middle East : Excursions and

²⁰ "Alexander Lyakhovskiy's Account of the Decision of the CC CPSU Decision to Send Troops to Afghanistan," December, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, A. A. Lyakhovskiy's "Plamya Afgana" (The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan) (Moscow, 1995), p. 109-112. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115531>

²¹ Mitrokhin, V., Ostermann, C. F., Westad, O. A., Cold War International History Project., & Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. (2002). The KGB in Afghanistan. Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Int'l. Center for Scholars. p.2

²² CIA Confirms Role in 1953 Iran Coup, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 435, accessed at: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435/>

incursions²³, Regime change in Iran: Overthrow of premier Mossadeq of Iran²⁴). At this point, it should be clarified that unofficial memoirs and records of involved individuals are preferable sources for the question at hand; after all, official documents are far more likely to present the illusion of a unified governmental body whereas unofficial, personal experiences are more likely to expose this fragmentation due to their 'off-the-record' nature. Naturally relevant historiography regarding the coup will also be used as a means to limit the 'contemporary bias' existing in the documentation produced by individuals that had lived through these events.

For the case of the KGB the situation is a bit more complex. A limited albeit valuable amount of documentation has been made available by the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) including some records of the official transcripts of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Politburo regarding the potential intervention in Afghanistan. The participation of KGB Chairman and later Soviet premier Andropov is indicative of the agency's primary role in the decision-making process²⁵. The KGB and its successor (FSB) have been far more reluctant when it comes to declassifying such documentation, however, a major piece in my research puzzle is the work of Soviet archivist and later defector Vasili Mitrokhin. One of his works were specifically dedicated in presenting the role of the KGB in Afghanistan and provides a detailed insight of the modus operandi of Lubyanka²⁶. Naturally, such records will be examined while considering the potential bias of a defector.

To recapitulate, this dissertation will attempt to exhibit the role of Intelligence Agencies in government overthrows throughout the Cold War -as autonomous actors-. The bureaucratic analysis model and Luttwak's-Singh's framework about coup execution will be the main methodological tools that I will employ and whereas Graham has applied the aforementioned approach in a Cold War setting (Cuba Crisis), it has yet to

²³ Donald, Wilber. 1986 *Adventures in the Middle East : Excursions and incursions* Princeton, N.J.: Darwin,

²⁴ Ibid 2006. *Regime change in Iran: overthrow of premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952 - August 1953*. Nottingham: Spokesman.

²⁵ "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," March 17, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhsD, f. 89, per. 25 dok.1, ll. 1, 12-25. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113260>

²⁶ Mitrokhin, V., Ostermann, C. F., Westad, O. A., Cold War International History Project., & Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. (2002). *The KGB in Afghanistan*. Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Int'l. Center for Scholars.

be employed in the field of clandestine operations and the intelligence-policy making relationship. By employing an amalgamation of secondary and mostly primary sources I seek to underpin that both the CIA and the KGB were not solely the long arm of the government but actors with their own agendas, priorities, and interests. The first part of the paper will focus on the decision making phase: An initial theoretical approach of the methodological tools (Bureaucratic politics approach) will be followed by their application in the foreign policy/ national security decision-making bodies of the US (National Security Council) and the USSR (Politburo). The main focuses, of course are the intelligence agencies and the respective directors that represent them in the aforementioned bodies. The two case studies will then be put into the autonomy/success test which will examine how the two agencies worked in all phases of the operations as well as how their acts might diverge from the main governmental orders based on the events themselves as well as the framework provided by Luttwak and Singh regarding coups d'état execution.

Chapter Two: The decision to execute the Coup(s)

2.1: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will tackle a crucial issue interrelated with a main question of this dissertation: the decision to execute the government overthrows and the role that leadership of the intelligence apparatus played towards that course of action. If one considers the Waltzian paradigm of the three levels of analysis in foreign policy, this paper will concentrate on the internal structure of the decision-making centers (Second Image) and the individuals that hold key positions within them (First Image).²⁷ Both the institutional role of the head of the CIA and the KGB within the respective executive bodies of their states as well as the very individuals who held the office when the shots were called. Allison's Conceptual Models and specifically the Bureaucratic Model will be a very helpful asset in that extent since it rejects the traditional realist 'rational actor'

²⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz. 2018. *Man, the State, and War : A Theoretical Analysis*. Vol. Anniversary edition. New York: Columbia University Press 16-20 & 80-82

in foreign policy and instead posits that foreign policy is exerted via resultants or bargaining between individual leaders in government positions.

Whereas Allison was not the first one to find the link between the structure of decision-making centers and policy making, his Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis were revolutionary in connecting the modus operandi of the state apparatus with foreign policy.²⁸ He provides two alternatives to the traditional ‘rational actor’ approach which views foreign policy as the agency of one singular monolithic entity. And while the ‘Organizational Model’ (Presented as Model II) also rejects the notion of the state functioning as a unitary entity, the ‘constellation of loosely based organizations’ perception is also problematic for the examined case since it views its behavior as the result of a pre-established routine.²⁹ This paradigm, while having its value, does not take into consideration the dynamic role that individuals play within and how influential the agency of an individual can be while holding a neuralgic post. A very simple example which is relevant to the examined case study is the completely different approach of two US administrations on the Iranian situation: If we endorsed the Organizational Approach, one would assume that the Eisenhower Administration would follow the same policy as its Truman predecessor, as foreign policy would be nothing more than repeatable patterns followed by the Oval, the Foreign Office and Langley.

The interaction and interconnection between the three aforementioned institutions and the chiefs within each one of them is examined by the ‘bureaucratic model’ (Presented as Model III). The bureaucratic politics model also moves beyond the confines of rigid national interests and seeks to comprehend the dynamics of decision-making in which organizational leaders participate.³⁰ In a rather simple albeit efficient metaphor, Graham compares the decision-making process regarding a foreign policy issue with a

²⁸ Pendleton Herring had recognized the dichotomy between Politics and Administration was a thin one and Long emphasized the importance of discretionary power, the broader political process, and the involvement of bureaucrats and their agencies in policy formulation, as well as implementation. Herring-Pendleton, E. (1936) *Public Administration and the Public Interest*. New York: McGraw-Hill ; Long, Norton (1949) *Power and Administration*. *Public Administration Review* 9, 257–64.

²⁹ Allison, Graham T. “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis.” *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 3 (1969): 689–718. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1954423>. 700

³⁰ Wood, Luke. “The Bureaucratic Politics of Germany’s First Greek Bailout Package.” *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 1 (2016): 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2016.340102>. 33-34

game. The main tenets of the approach are presented as questions and will be used as a methodological tool to underline the autonomous role of the intelligence agencies in our case studies:

1. Who plays?

As mentioned before, this approach does not view the executive power (government) as a unitary actor nor as a set of institutions but focuses on the individuals that hold key roles in the crucial institutions. And while the assumption that the higher the position that one has in this hierarchy, the more influential their position might be, there are other subliminal forces in the lower echelons that can have a non-proportionate effect on the end decision.³¹

2. What is the game?

The in-governmental bargaining that produces the final foreign policy decision happens through what Graham defines as ‘action-channels’, the regularized means of taking a governmental action on a specific issue. The action-channels play a crucial role in the game as they decide the composition of the team that is playing and how significant the role of each player is. The rules of the game are, of course, the domestic law of the decision-making country and usually the rules of procedure regarding the executive power.³²

3. What determines the stand of each player?

Graham recognizes the existence of specific propensities and priorities each of the players have and of course specific goals and interests. These interests begin from the common and vague ‘national interest’ which of course can be interpreted differently

³¹ A strong criticism of the Bureaucratic Politics Approach entails its neglecting of other non-traditional factors that affect foreign policy such as lobbying and interest groups that do not hold an office within the institutional framework. Nathan and Oliver in particular have commented that ‘We can [...] gain only a distorted view of policy from the perspective of public governmental process if our conception of that process is too narrowly drawn’. Nathan, J.A., and Oliver, J.K. (1978) Bureaucratic Politics: Academic Windfalls and Intellectual Pitfalls. *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 6, 81–91.

³² A useful example by Graham for an ‘Action-Channel’ presents a situation where the US wants to militarily intervene in a third country. The channel would include things such as the recommendation by the ambassador to the third country, the assessment by the Chiefs of Staff and the intelligence community and, a recommendation by the Secretaries of State and Defense and of course the Presidential Decision to intervene.

depending on the aforementioned predispositions and continue with the more narrow domestic and organizational interests and finally the personal interests and stakes of an involved individual. Other exterior factors such as a deadline set by the central administration also affects the stance of the players.

4. What determines the impact of each player on the final decision?

In a rather Machiavellian manner, Graham recognizes ‘power’ as the sole factor that determines how influential each of the players are in the end result. Of course, the term power is further clarified and one could divide the traits that make up this ‘power’ into external and internal: External is the formal authority, responsibility and the bargaining advantages (and disadvantages) that a person possesses from their institutional position. The internal traits are of course the personality of the individual, how capable and willing this individual is when it comes to using the aforementioned position to achieve their goals.

The case study employed by the political scientist was the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis by the Kennedy Administration and specifically the ad hoc committee that convened to advise the President throughout the standoff (EXCOMM).³³ Graham makes reference to some of more influential members of the committee and how they affected the final decisions made by the President. Helpful to our case is the example of CIA director John A. McCone, a man that is described as a warhawk, was a strong advocate for a strategic airstrike against Cuba as an alternative to the decided blockade.

Essentially he posits that the US foreign policy in the post WWII period had become increasingly cumbersome and political. The president definitely possesses a position of *primus inter pares* but is not omnipotent. Policy flows from different organizations and political actors. Of course, one could raise the question of whether or not this paradigm is applicable at a universal level or if it is tailor-made for the American political apparatus.³⁴ It is for this very reason that one must tread carefully and take into

³³ Executive Committee of the National Security Council

³⁴ According to Brummer most attempts at the application of the bureaucratic politics model draw heavily from the American case and ignore the differences between the American political system and the parliamentary systems of Western and Central Europe Klaus Brummer, *Die Innenpolitik der Außenpolitik: die Große Koalition ‘Governmental Politics’ und Auslandseinsätze der Bundeswehr* (Wiesbaden, 2013)

consideration the sensitivities of the domestic politics of the non-US examined country, in our case the Soviet Union, when applying this approach.

2.2 The United States decision to overthrow Mossadegh: Allen Dulles and the National Security Council

If a US politics scholar were to pinpoint a milestone in the foreign policy of the superpower throughout the cold war, the 1947 National Security Act should definitely be considered. This law, which came into effect under the Truman administration, became a major reorganization of the foreign policy and military establishments of the U.S. Government and is crucial for the examined case study since it created two relevant institutions:³⁵ the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency³⁶. To employ Graham's bureaucratic approach terminology, we can say that the National Security Council is the 'action channel' and the DCI³⁷ is the 'player' that requires our focus.

Allen Dulles is our person of interest: a more romanticized title could be a 'spy by profession and inclination'. Raised in a strongly religious and conservative family, Dulles was a staunch supporter of US interventionism from the early days of the Second World War and participated in intelligence operations in the Office of Strategic Services. During the Truman Administration, he became one of the key figures within the nascent CIA and even wrote a few reports regarding a potential worldwide program of covert psychological warfare, clandestine political activity, sabotage and guerrilla activity. He became the Deputy Director of the Agency and once Ike was sworn in, he was promoted to DCI. It was no coincidence that the newly sworn Secretary of State

³⁵ US Office of the Historian, National Security Act of 1947, Office of the Historian Website: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act>

³⁶ Naturally, previous presidents had their own circle of trustworthy advisors on issues of national security. For example, FDR had depended on top White House aides such as Harry Hopkins and Admiral William D. Leahy. This inner circle of advisors, however, had not been previously institutionalized. Similar intelligence gathering organizations like the WW2 Office of Strategic Services predated the CIA but fell within the jurisdiction of the military. Judson Knight, 'NSC, National Security Council, History' Encyclopedia of Espionage, Intelligence, and Security (Gale Research Inc, 2003)

³⁷ Director of Central Intelligence. Head of the CIA

was Allen's brother: John Foster Dulles. The Dulles brothers are a unique case in American politics: Never before or after them have two siblings run the overt and covert sides of US foreign policy. They worked in harmony to achieve their common goals. The overthrow of Mossadegh was the first and most urgent one.³⁸ Kinzer vividly describes the duo as 'fierce Cold Warriors' who perceived the 1950s global reality as an ideological battleground they had to win.³⁹ Allen in particular was fearful of a 'second China' and would do what is necessary to achieve the promised rollback against the red menace. The Dulles brothers became key players in the coup d'état in late 1952, only a couple of months before Eisenhower's inauguration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Truman administration had turned down the British request for overthrowing Mossadegh but after Ike's election, British agents approached the duo with the same offer.⁴⁰

A short divergence from our main story is necessary to explain a reasonable question that might arise: since the UK government is the agent provocateur behind the intervention in Iran, why does this dissertation not consider British agency? The 1950s saw the gradual decline of British domination in the Middle East and its gradual replacement as a main player by the US. The case of Iran was no exception: In October 1952 and after continuous British interference in Iranian domestic politics (including a failed coup), Mossadegh cut diplomatic ties with the UK and expelled all British diplomats from the country. Westminster continued to monitor the situation mostly from Cyprus but direct participation in the coup would be impossible.⁴¹ For this very reason, American agency was indispensable to achieve the removal of Mossadegh and since previous efforts to the Truman administration were unsuccessful, a different course of action had to be followed with the Eisenhower bunch: With Churchill's blessings, senior SIS agent Christopher Woodhouse played his cards right to pique the interest of the Yanks. He would later write that he emphasized the threat of communism

³⁸ Kinzer, Stephen. *The Brothers : John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War*. New York :Time Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2013. 152-153

³⁹ *Ibid.* 4

⁴⁰ During one of the final National Security Council Meetings under Truman, 'plans for the specific military, economic, diplomatic, and psychological measures which should be taken to support a non-communist Iranian Government or to prevent all or part of Iran or adjacent areas from falling under communist domination' were being considered as a last resort and were never carried out. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, Doc. 240

⁴¹ Mark J. Gasiorowski, and Malcolm Byrne, 129

rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry to convince the Dulles. The red scare was essentially being employed as a Trojan Horse in order ‘ to use the Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire’.⁴²

It didn’t take long for the Dulles brothers to enthusiastically accept: for Allen in particular, the successful overthrow of the communist sympathizing Mossadegh would deliver the promised rollback against the Red and at the same time would give to his nascent agency a new *raison d’être*, beyond intelligence gathering. Never before had the United States used covert means in order to overthrow a democratically-elected government. It was now up to the Dulles to convince Ike to greenlight what would become known as operation TPAJAX. The National Security Council was the action channel to achieve it. And while Truman occasionally convened the group from time to time, Eisenhower had made it a central role of US foreign and security policy. The body convened on a weekly basis. Kinzer posits that the Council was dominated by the brothers and the March 4, 1953 session was no exception.⁴³ Dulles presented the ongoing situation in a convenient manner: He intentionally underlined the calls for a Mossadegh-Tudeh united front expressed by an illegal communist radio in Northern Iran, he warned of the deteriorating political status quo that could lead to a communist takeover while also underlining that the fall of Iran would instigate a domino effect that would result in 60% of global oil reserves falling in the hands of the reds. The same narrative was affirmed by similar documents such as a late 1952 National Intelligence Estimate by the CIA regarding ‘probable developments in Iran through 1953’⁴⁴ and a February 20 telegram by the US Embassy in Tehran that warned that ‘the National movement organization continues to disintegrate’.⁴⁵ And while Eisenhower seemed reluctant to overthrow Mossadegh and in the very same meeting considered the alternative of providing aid for the Premier to solidify his position, he was eventually

⁴² Ivan L. G. Pearson, *In the Name of Oil: Anglo-American Relations in the Middle East, 1950–1958*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 28

⁴³ Kinzer, Stephen. *The Brothers* 135

⁴⁴ Extract from the Estimate: ‘If present trends in Iran continue unchecked beyond the end of 1953, rising internal tensions[...] open the way for at least a gradual assumption of control by Tudeh.’ National Intelligence Estimate Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951–1954, 143 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54IranEd2/d143>

⁴⁵ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951–1954, Doc. 155 Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State February 1953 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d155>

convinced. The exact record of the meeting where Ike gave his approval has not been declassified but the die seems to have been cast around March-April of 1953.⁴⁶ Full authority over the operation was given to the US Ambassador to Tehran Henderson and chief of the CIA Station in Tehran, Kermit Roosevelt. The latter figure played his own autonomous role in the coup and that will be examined in the next chapter.

2.3 The USSR decision to overthrow Amin: Yuri Andropov and the Politburo.

In the aftermath of the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, Kissinger made the following comment regarding the modus operandi of Soviet foreign policy: It is always tempting to arrange diverse Soviet moves into a grand design. The more esoteric brands of Kremlinology often purport to see each and every move as part of the carefully orchestrated score in which events inexorably move to the grand finale. Experience has shown that this has rarely if ever been the case. Instead, there has been a large element of improvisation in Soviet policy.⁴⁷ While this view expressed by the former Secretary of State refers to a specific period of Soviet politics and cannot be generalized in its 75-year history, it is more than relevant in the examined case study. Similar to Kissinger's view, this part focuses on the decision making during the Brezhnev era with a specific interest on how this improvisation stems from internal bargaining within the highest executive organ within the USSR: the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. Throughout the history of the Union, this body played not only a primary role in the decision process of the Soviet state but also the main means for Soviet leaders to consolidate or lose their position of power.

After Lenin's death, Stalin employed factional rivalries within the Politburo to play the Left and the Right opposition against each other and eventually establish his absolute

⁴⁶ According to key agent in the coup Donald Wilbert on 4 April 1953, Dulles approved a budget of \$ 1,000,000 which could be used in any way to bring about the fall of Mossadeq. CIA Clandestine Service History, "Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953," March 1954, by Dr. Donald Wilber. & Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, Doc.184 Memorandum From the Chief of the Near East and Africa Division, Directorate of Plans (Roosevelt) to the Director of Central Intelligence (Dulles) April 1953 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54IranEd2/d184>

⁴⁷ Kissinger, Henry. 1979. White House years. Boston: Little, Brown. 161

authority.⁴⁸ For Krushchev, Stalin's successor, it would be the arbitrary decision making and the lack of collegiality that led to him being ousted by the Politburo (renamed Presidium at the time) and Soviet leadership. Brezhnev, the instigator behind the ousting of his predecessor was well knowledgeable that ruling by consensus and by satisfying all parties was indispensable for him to remain in power.⁴⁹ The modus operandi in the politburo under Brezhnev is a crucial element when examining the decision to intervene in Afghanistan. Armstrong underlines the significance of the supreme decision making by stating that it brought together most of the men with great personal influence in the Soviet elite, including the heads of major sections of the apparatus.⁵⁰

One of these influential men was Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov. The biography of the soviet statesman is an intriguing and controversial one but it is necessary to focus on some crucial events that led his rise to power as well as his views on Soviet interventionism and the eventual decision to overthrow Amin in Afghanistan. After rising through the lower echelons of the CPSU, the Soviet politician was appointed Ambassador to the Hungarian Socialist Republic in 1954. From this position, Andropov played a key role in the suppression of the Hungarian uprising by convincing a hesitant Khrushchev to decisively and violently suppress what he considered to be 'counter revolutionary forces'.⁵¹ That experience greatly influenced Andropov and left him what some of his colleagues described as a 'Hungarian Complex'; the violent momentum that saw the near collapse of a satellite political apparatus that had been under the grip of Moscow for more than ten years required a proportionately violent reaction.⁵² The fragility of such regimes and the necessity for drastic action to retain Soviet suzerainty becomes clear in the Czechoslovakian Spring as well as the examined case study.

⁴⁸ Rees, E. A. 2004. *The nature of Stalin's dictatorship: the Politburo 1928-1953*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴⁹ Jones, Ellen. 1984. «Committee Decision Making in the Soviet Union». *World Politics* 36 (2): 165–188. doi:10.2307/2010230. 182

⁵⁰ Armstrong, John A. 1962. *Ideology, politics, and government in the Soviet Union: an introduction*. New York: Praeger. 55

⁵¹ Litván, György, János M. Bak, and Lyman Howard Legters. 1996. *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: reform, revolt, and repression, 1953-1963*. London: Longman. 58

⁵² His personal involvement in the brutal suppression of the Revolution would earn Andropov the title 'Butcher of Budapest. Timothy Andrews Sayle (2009) *Andropov's Hungarian Complex, Cold War History*, 9:3, 427-439, DOI: 10.1080/14682740902764528

In 1967, he was appointed chief of the KGB by Brezhnev in order for the latter to secure political control over the intelligence and security apparatus. Andropov became the longest-serving and according to Christopher the most ‘politically astute’ director of the Agency.⁵³ From this position, Andropov significantly influenced the flow of information that reached top soviet officials, including members of the Politburo and Brezhnev. The same year of his assignment to KGB premier, Andropov was also the first leader of the Intelligence Apparatus to join the Politburo as a candidate member. In spite of not possessing voting rights in the organ yet, Andropov influenced the formulation of foreign policy at a lower level as an executor of that policy, a provider of information, and a generator of ideas, solutions, and alternatives.⁵⁴

The Czechoslovakian crisis is a clear example of how the KGB chairman manipulated the situation to convince the members of the Politburo that the evangelized ‘socialism with a human face’ was nothing more than a Trojan horse orchestrated by NATO to jeopardize the integrity of the Warsaw Pact. He affirmed this ‘imperialist plot’ via providing fabricated intelligence to the politburo and the Soviet public alike, going as far as discarding information offered by subordinates within his own agency which affirmed that there was no CIA infiltration in the Czechoslovakian movement.⁵⁵

Throughout the 70s, Andropov would continue to increase his influence within the Politburo de jure and de facto: In 1973, he was promoted to a full voting member and his personal ties with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov, as well as a close foreign policy adviser to Brezhnev would make him a key voice in the decision-making process. Soviet Ambassador to Washington and Politician Anatoly Dobrynin would later comment that this triumvirate (or the more Russian appropriate troika) constituted the core of determining Soviet Foreign Policy.⁵⁶ This bloc would dominate the sessions of the politburo with Andropov and Gromyko

⁵³ Andrew, Christopher M., and Vasili Mitrokhin. 1999. *The sword and the shield: the Mitrokhin archive and the secret history of the KGB*. 16

⁵⁴ Zickel, Raymond E, Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division, and Eugene K Keefe. *Soviet Union: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: 762-765

⁵⁵ Soviet KGB agent and later dissident Oleg Kalugin would later state in an interview that he had presented “absolutely reliable documents proving that neither the CIA nor any other agency was manipulating the Movement but the Moscow Center ordered Kalugin’s messages not to be shown to anyone and destroyed. Andrew, Christopher M., and Vasili Mitrokhin. 1999. *The sword and the shield: the Mitrokhin archive and the secret history of the KGB*. 256-257

⁵⁶ Dobrynin, Anatoly. (2016) 2016. *In Confidence..* University of Washington Press. 519

successfully presenting joint memos to the Politburo and Ustinov also joining the fray. Another key practical factor to consider is the ailing and deteriorating condition of premier Brezhnev who had suffered a serious stroke in 1975 and never recovered until his passing in 1982. His weakening physical state gradually turned him into more of a figurehead ripe for influence by other politburo members. The decision to intervene in Afghanistan affirms the leading role of the three men and Andropov individually.

The first official discussion of potential armed intervention in Afghanistan within the Politburo occurred in March 1979 in the aftermath of the Herat Uprising against the Taraki Government. Taraki made a distress call to Moscow requesting direct military support against the insurgents. It is no coincidence that all three members initially opposed a decisive course of action with Andropov in particular positing that Afghanistan is 'an Islamic, backwards country not ready for the revolution' and a suppression of an uprising there could only happen with bayonets, an undesirable course of action that would brand the USSR as the aggressor.⁵⁷ The fear of international repercussions seems to have become of minor concern for Andropov and the troika once Amin ousted Taraki. As was the case in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Amin was now in Andropov's crosshairs, who would leave no possible counterrevolutionary stone unturned.

On October 29 of the same year, the Troika (that now had an official institutional role over the ongoing developments, known as the 'Afghanistan Commission') submitted a memorandum where it expressed its concerns over the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. Among others, they accused Amin of brutal repressions within the PDPA and most importantly contacts with US officials, a move that according to their interpretation could lead 'a change in the political line of Afghanistan which is pleasing to Washington'.⁵⁸ While Andropov suggested that the Central Committee continue to work with Amin until he further exposes his true intentions, Andropov was already working behind the scenes to find a replacement for the to-be-ousted leader. KGB agents contacted Afghani political emigrés as the new political elite to replace Amin's

⁵⁷ His position was immediately seconded by Gromyko and Ustinov. "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," March 17, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 89, per. 25 dok.1, ll. 1, 12-25. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113260>

⁵⁸ Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to the CC CPSU on the Situation in Afghanistan, October 29, 1979, The National Security Archive <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r6.pdf>

gang. It should be noted that this happened without any politburo approval. With help from the KGB future Afghan Premier Babrak Karmal drafted a “personal letter” to Brezhnev informing him that ‘he is fully prepared to fulfill his duty and in a positive way solve the problems of the April Revolution, the party and the state’.⁵⁹

A personal memorandum by Andropov to Brezhnev in early December of the same year underlines Andropov’s attempt to manipulate the situation by stating that ‘-we-were contacted by a group of Afghan communists abroad’, suggesting that the government-in-exile had not been organized through his personal intervention was an autonomous group that had reached out to the Soviets.⁶⁰ His suggestion for a military intervention to install Karmal in power would be greenlighted by the Politburo after a meeting where Andropov checked all the boxes of Brezhnev’s fears: a plan in the making by the CIA to create a Neo-Ottoman Empire that would encompass the Southern Republics of the USSR, the installation of short range American missiles (Type Piershing) that were threatening vital soviet provinces and the acquisition of Afghanistan’s uranium deposits by Pakistan and Iraq to develop their own nuclear arsenal.⁶¹

On December 12th 1979, the Politburo entrusted Andropov, Ustinov and Gromyko to execute all measures ‘concerning the situation in A’. The ‘great gamble’ to overthrow Amin and restore a loyal to Moscow government will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Execution of the coups

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The most vital part of the planned interventions is, of course, their execution. Whereas the extralegal transfer of power to a party on better terms with the sponsoring power is

⁵⁹ Tomsen, Peter. 2011. *The wars of Afghanistan: messianic terrorism, tribal conflicts, and the failures of great powers*. New York: PublicAffairs. 183-184

⁶⁰ "Personal memorandum Andropov to Brezhnev," December 01, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, APRF, from notes taken by A. F. Dobrynin and provided to Norwegian Nobel Institute; provided to CWIHP by Odd Arne Westad, Director of Research, Nobel Institute; trans. for CWIHP by Daniel Rozas. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113254>

⁶¹ :Alexander Lyakhovsky, *The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan GPI Iskon*, Moscow, 1995, pp.109-112

the common end goal of the examined coup attempts, there are multiple operational details and approaches for that purpose: In this chapter, the autonomy criterion will be applied to a field agent level.

Singh presents three different coup models, which envision different factors and mid-term goals as a way to determine the *modus operandi* but also the success or failure of an overthrow attempt⁶²: Coups as battles, a traditional almost military view where the means to victory is tactical dominance. A swift and surgical strike at the organizational heart of the state apparatus is crucial in order to usurp power the traditional way.⁶³ The second model interprets a coup as a game of coordination: as opposed to the previous clandestine nature of a swift battle that requires subtlety and discretion, the coordination game focuses specifically on making as much noise as possible to give the impression that the coup participants exert absolute control in societal and political life alike. This is achieved via the control of broadcasting facilities or symbolic targets (Building of Parliament) which seek to assert a dominant position both to the general populations as well as other coup participants to prevent any potential defections.⁶⁴ A third view perceives a coup d'état as an election; a plebiscite addressed to the military actors of the involved country. The goal is more nuanced but if achieved, can guarantee the loyalty of the participating members of the armed forces in the overthrow attempt: just like a political party, the instigators of the coup make the case that the existing status quo lack legitimacy and for reasons such as public order or national security, the military must intervene to fill the vacuum of authority.⁶⁵

Luttwak's approach seems to be closer to the 'battle model' since the framework he presents focuses on the tactical details of the process and specifically the objectives that need to be captured. He determines the operational success of a coup in strategic terms and divides the crucial targets in three categories:⁶⁶ A-Targets are usually the more heavily protected (usually with military defenses) facilities. This includes points such as the residences of the head that the coup seeks to decapitate (royal/presidential

⁶² Singh. 2014 15

⁶³ Ibid 15-17

⁶⁴ Ibid 18-21

⁶⁵ Ibid 21-24

⁶⁶ This classification is not based on the significance of the targets but the different required skill-set by each of the task-forces that will attempt to capture them. Luttwak. 2016. 184-186

palace), police and army headquarters or barracks. To deter a long and costly engagement, either an all-out attack or a small infiltration group is required for such a task. B-targets include more technical facilities which are more lightly guarded such as telecommunications, radio or television stations. This infrastructure should not be destroyed but captured and repurposed in order to control public information and also limit the communication capabilities of the overthrown side and by extent the possibility of a counter-coup. C-Targets are not buildings or infrastructure but individuals that do not fall within the category of ‘main leaders’ but are personalities that if not ceased, can use their command authority or/and personal charisma in order to muster loyalist forces and put an end to the coup.

By using this methodological toolbox offered by Luttwak and Singh, I will assess the modus operandi of the CIA and the KGB agents in the respective coups while also examining how autonomously they acted from the orders provided by the higher ups.

3.2 Iran: the 28 Morad/ August 19 Coup

The CIA Tehran station that orchestrated and executed the coup under Kermit Roosevelt made use of US and British assets alike: Even if the British had been kicked out of Iran in 1952, their decades-long presence in Iran had attained crucial tools, mainly a civilian network with the Rashidian brothers at its head: the three Iranian siblings had strong connections with the bazaar and other elements of society (lutigari) that could be hired to act as provocateurs. In addition, informal ties continued to exist between Westminster and Iran’s socio-political elite such as the Majlis, the military and even the clergy. This included Majlis Speaker and significant religious figurehead Ayatollah Kashani and General Fazlollah Zahedi, the chosen replacement for Mossadegh.⁶⁷ Their American counterparts in turn had a fully functioning embassy with diplomats, military advisers and spies having infiltrated many elements of Iranian society, military and politics mostly in the context of operation TPBEDAMN.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The official CIA History record of the coup describes Zahedi as ‘not an ideal candidate’. This seems to be a very strong euphemism, since the same work recognizes his collaboration with Nazi Germany during WW2 and anti-British position. CIA History Staff, “Zendabad, Shah!” 18-19

⁶⁸ This psychological warfare operation intended to undermine the influence of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party, through covert propaganda and political action. The network created through this operation would be a great asset to Roosevelt and his team. Mark J. Gasiorowski; The CIA's TPBEDAMN

The coup essentially consisted of two main phases: an initial pre-coup part that aimed to destabilize the government by discrediting Mosaddeq and other National Front leaders and creating splits within the National Front. This practice which could be identified with Singh's 'cooperation game' was indeed attempting to win public opinion and justify the dismissal of a government that is not only unpopular but also dangerous to the national interest. Such was achieved in the conventional manner that was bribery of deputies, with the goal of impeding parliamentary processes and potentially 'democratically' ousting Mossadegh with a vote of no confidence.⁶⁹ A second method which falls into the category of black propaganda was the bribery of the press in exchange of vitriolic articles against the National Front. Other than the usual condemnation as an anti-religious Tudeh collaborator, some more 'colorful' articles 'revealed' Mossadegh's 'Jewish ancestry' while his Foreign Minister and close associate Hossein Fatemi was denounced as a homosexual and a convert to Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith.⁷⁰ A third individual act that intended to give another strong symbolic message was the kidnapping and gruesome assassination of police leader Mahmoud Afshartous. His tortured and strangled body was dumped in public and aimed not just to warn that other members from Mossadegh's inner circle could share Afshartous' fate but also to depict a weak government apparatus that is incapable of protecting even the chief responsible for public order and security.⁷¹

The next step can be regarded perhaps as the most crucial one for the legitimization of the coup as well as the connecting point between the preparatory and the military component was acquiring the support of the Shah. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was initially reluctant to provide any kind of support to a gamble that could jeopardize his already precarious position and lead to him sharing his father's fate. His twin sister,

Operation and the 1953 Coup in Iran. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2013; 15 (4): 4–24. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00393

⁶⁹ According to Wilber, a total 41 votes had to be secured for a safe quorum for a 'quasi-legal' move from a total of 79 seats. For that purpose 11,000 \$ were being funneled every week to purchase the loyalty of the deputies. Wilber 1954, 19

⁷⁰ Abrahamian claims that many of these articles were planted in the newspaper *Joshan* in Isfahan. Abrahamian, Ervand. 2013. *The Coup : 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. New York: New Press 178, 250

⁷¹ Kennett Lovespecial, 1953. IRAN POLICE CHIEF FOUND STRANGLED; Mossadegh Foes Implicated -- General Left Clue That Led to Discovery of Murder, *The New York Times Archives*. 27th April 1953 <https://www.nytimes.com/1953/04/27/archives/iran-police-chief-found-strangled-mossadegh-foes-implicated-general.html?smid=url-share>

Princess Ashrafi, an undercover visit by American General Norman Schwarzkopf and some hidden conversations with Kermit Roosevelt, the Shah reluctantly signed two firmans (royal decrees) which were instrumental for the execution of the overthrow since it was given a quasi-legal justification.⁷² The first one dismissed Mossadegh as Prime Minister and the second appointed Zahedi as his successor.

With these crucial documents in hand, the first coup attempt happened on the 15th of August and failed. Under Commander of the Imperial Guard, Colonel Nematollah Nassiri, a pro-royalist army detachment made its way to Mossadegh's residence to deliver the firman and arrest him. The plan did not come into fruition, as a superior loyalist force had previously arrived to defend the prime minister. The coup's plan had been leaked by a Captain of the Imperial Guard who was also a member of the Tudeh Party. Mossadegh's chief of staff, General Taghi Riahi rushed five brigades in Tehran and the first attempt to overthrow the National Front failed.

The Shah and his wife fled to Baghdad and the CIA, not willing to expose any kind of American in the attempted overthrow, called off the whole operation. A Telegram from Langley to the Tehran station mentions that 'we should not participate in any operation against Mossadegh which could be traced back to the US and further compromise future relations with him which may become the only course of action left open to the US.'⁷³ This message is an indicator that the United States were even considering a policy towards Iran which accepted the Mossadegh administration. Historical reality, of course, shows that things did not turn out that way and the Tehran station disobeyed the orders from HQ. The official CIA history record of the coups' events keeps all the pages regarding Roosevelt's course of action in the aftermath classified.⁷⁴ Roosevelt's own recital of events includes him responding to HQ with a positive *fait accompli* exploiting the time difference and the required time for the cable to reach the US: 'Happy to report R. N. Ziegler [the pseudonym for Zahedi] safely installed and KGSAVOY [the

⁷² In 1953, Iran was a constitutional monarchy with the Shah retaining significant executive powers, including the right to appoint a prime minister. Meddling in parliamentary affairs and elections was common practice but popular pressure due to Mossadegh's popularity had forced the Shah to make him prime minister.

⁷³ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, Doc. 278. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Iran August 18th 1953 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d278>

⁷⁴ CIA History Staff, "Zendebad, Shah!" 56-60

cryptonym for the Shah] will be returning to Teheran in triumph shortly. Love and kisses from all the team'.⁷⁵ Abrahamian claims that Roosevelt went as far as threatening to shoot anyone who would engage in defeatist talk.⁷⁶ While no declassified records of the mentioned response exists, a similar telegram exists which is dated on August 19th and states that the 'Overthrow of Mossadeq appears on verge of success.'⁷⁷ In spite of the conflicting details regarding the circumstances under which the Station decided to act unilaterally, there is a consensus that Roosevelt's agency was of pivotal importance for the autonomous continuation of the operation.

As Roosevelt later pointed out, while the first attempt failed at a military level, the rest of the assets, including the bribed groups, public figures, newspapers and other branches of the military remained intact. The most important tool at the group's disposal were the firmans which might have been dismissed by Mossadegh as anti-constitutional but their publishing in most opposition and/or bribed newspapers galvanized royalist public opinion and publicized the legal reasoning behind the upcoming coup. The intention was to show that it was Mossadegh that carried out a coup against the legitimate Shah, not the other way around. At the same time, Roosevelt and his team exploited the pro-Mossadegh demonstrations that were celebrating the failure in Tehran: A meeting between Mossadegh and US Ambassador Henderson was arranged and the diplomat after accusing the pro-Mossadegh crowds of harassing US Nationals in Tehran, threatened with cessation of diplomatic relations and American aid, should the government fail to restore order. Mossadegh took the bait and forbade any kind of demonstrations from taking place. In addition, he ordered the army into the streets to restore order and also promoted his nephew, Mohammed Daftari to chief of the police and military governor of Tehran. Both of these decisions were catalytic to Mossadegh's downfall since Daftari, in spite of his familial ties to Mossadegh, was on the side of the conspirators and upon being deployed in the city, mostly pro-royalist regiments began ceasing neuralgic positions.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Roosevelt, *Countercoup* 191

⁷⁶ Abrahamian, *The Coup*. 187

⁷⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, Doc. 286. Telegram From the Station in Iran to the Central Intelligence Agency August 19th 1953 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951-54Iran/d286>

⁷⁸Rahnema, Ali. 2014. *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks*, 155-173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139875974.013. 97

It should be underlined that throughout these events, the black propaganda machine of the CIA station went into overdrive; other than distributing the firman of the shah through paper and radio, forged pamphlets that called for the establishment of a ‘People’s Democratic Republic’, issued threats against clerical leaders with one sham bombing taking place against the house of a cleric. Such moves sought to connect these acts with the Tudeh-National Front demonstrations and demonize them as anti-religious, pro-communist crowds. On the other hand, the mobs under the control of the Rashidian brothers and other agents which consisted among others of luti, chaqu keshan (knife wielders), zurkhaneh athletes, prostitutes and unemployed individuals attacked National Front and Tudeh targets (individuals, newspapers, gathering places).⁷⁹ The only uniting element of that picturesque group was their alleged conviction and love for their Shah and the desire to oust the tyrant Mossadegh.⁸⁰ Other than fuelling instability in the capital and providing further justification for the army to intervene, this amalgamation of mostly hired groups sought to give the impression that this was no organized act but a spontaneous popular uprising.

With popular opinion and the pro-royalist forces having been already swindled, the coup had successfully completed its phase of being a cooperation game and a plebiscite. The final phase, the battle had begun. The military units loyal to the coup began ceasing strategic targets that had been predetermined from the first attempt. Using Luttwak’s categorization, they include A, B and C targets: The main goal (Target A) was Mossadegh’s residence where he convened with 15 of his closest associates. A strike force consisting of twenty-four tanks and infantry managed to capture the estate even if Mossadegh himself evaded capture. Other A targets included the Police and Military Police headquarters and the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. Targets B included the main communication center and radio Tehran station. Right after the occupation of the station, Zahedi was rushed in by Roosevelt to make a triumphant speech. Targets C were not the focus of the coup the day it occurred since as Luttwak

⁷⁹Rahnema, Ali. 2014. «The second coup begins with the pincer movement of the thugs». Chapter in . *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks*, 155–173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139875974.013.

⁸⁰ Gözl, Olmo. (2019). *The Dangerous Classes and the 1953 Coup in Iran: On the Decline of lutigari Masculinities*. 10.5040/9781838605902.ch-011.

mentions, they are the most elusive. These would be the focus of the new Zahedi government that hunted down Mosaddeq's colleagues and Tudeh Party members.

In a couple of days, a blunder that had failed due to treason from within had turned into a game changer for Iran, the CIA and the Middle East. From a superficial point of view, the coup was a success: Mossadegh was out, Zahedi and the Shah were back in and oil could once again flow westward. The long-lasting effects of the coups will be examined in my concluding remarks.

3.3 Afghanistan: Operation Storm 333 and the overthrow of Hafizullah Amin

Long before the operation to overthrow Amin, Soviet agents had permeated the ministries of government and the units of the military with Gress positing that Soviet military advisers were found down in each battalion of the DRA Armed Forces.⁸¹ These individuals provided crucial intelligence to Moscow and were prepared to carry out subversive activities and sabotage at the request of the main government. The most pivotal element which allowed all these aforementioned activities to take place was the pretense of Moscow's approval and friendship towards Amin: the main force that was dispatched to overthrow and assassinate him, was deployed at his request under the pretext of help against the increasing rebel activity. This strategy of deception, known in Russian military strategy as maskirovka, was strengthened by the fact that until the very day of the overthrow, Soviet economic and military aid to Amin never ceased.⁸²

The composition of the forces that were deployed as military support to Amin reflects the operational harmony between the KGB under Andropov and the defense-military apparatus under Ustinov: the 154th OSN (Special Purpose Detachment) commonly known as the Muslim Battalion⁸³ and a detachment from the 345th Independent

⁸¹ Lester W. Grau, and Michael A. Gress. 2002. *The Soviet-Afghan War: how a superpower fought and lost*. Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas. 19

⁸² Egor Evsikov. 2009. *Soviet Intelligence in Afghanistan: The Only Efficient Tool of the Politburo*, *Baltic Security & Defence Review* Volume 11, 2009 48-49

⁸³The fighting force consisted of soldiers from the Central Asian Republics of the USSR (mostly Tajiks, Turkmens and Uzbeks). Their physical appearance allowed them to pass off as Afghanis.

Parachute Regiment which responded to the Ministry of Defense and the special KGB commando units codenamed 'Zenith' and 'Grom' which in turn responded to Lubyanka. A total force of approximately 600 men would need to deal with more than 2,000 soldiers alone in Amin's residence.⁸⁴

The element of surprise, speed, strategic operational and tactical deception were of the essence and before the execution of the operation itself, some crucial pre-coup acts were necessary. A main priority would be to paralyze Afghan communications to deter potential reinforcements from arriving at the presidential palace. Such was achieved by KGB agents and Zenith operators that managed to infiltrate and disable the communications center leaving the whole of Kabul without telephone connections.⁸⁵ Other KGB and Soviet elements had infiltrated Amin's inner circle and his residence, Tadz-Bek palace and managed to compile a story-by-story layout of the compound as well as poison the dinner of the leader and his whole staff.⁸⁶ Finally, right after the commencement of the operation on the evening of the 27th of December 1979, military advisers sought to conduct sabotage activities on the Afghan units they were attached to. An example of such is the advisers attached to the DRA Air Defense Forces that took some anti-aircraft installations out of service by removing their sights and firing locks.⁸⁷

These subversive activities facilitated the main operation with the codename 'Storm 333'. The course of action decided by the Kremlin clearly falls within the 'coup as a battle' vision, since the use of military elements is predominant while overwhelmingly neglecting local agency. The attack on the presidential palace was 'the mother of all battles' with soviet military analysis describing its defenses as formidable. In spite of their significant numerical inferiority the Soviet forces succeeded in overpowering the defenses and executing Amin.⁸⁸ The element of surprise was key in the operation's

⁸⁴Mark Galeotti. 2021. Storm-333: KGB and Spetsnaz seize Kabul, Soviet-Afghan War 1979, Osprey Publishing, 22

⁸⁵ Ibid 40

⁸⁶ L̄aR̄hovskiĭ, A. A., Gary Goldberg, and Artemy Kalinovsky. 2007. Inside the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the seizure of Kabul, December 1979. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Int'l. Center for Scholars. 50

⁸⁷ Ibid 45

⁸⁸ Such was the secrecy of the operation that even many from the Soviet staff were not informed. As a result, two Soviet doctors that were treating Amin after the poisoning were killed during the assault

success as well as its aftermath: the fact that almost all combatants were wearing military uniforms of the Afghan army caused confusion to the actual defenders and allowed the Soviet side to officially deny any kind of involvement and affirm that this was an internal coup. A report of the events by Andropov, Ustinov, Gromykov and Ponomarev only 3 days after they took place, underlines the agency of the Afghani people by stating: ‘Riding the wave of patriotic sentiments that have engaged fairly large numbers of the Afghan population [...] the forces opposing H. Amin organized an armed operation which resulted in the overthrow of his regime. This operation has received broad support from the working masses [...] and state apparatus.’⁸⁹

Other than the attack on that presidential palace, other targets in Kabul can be categorized in Luttwak’s A and B targets: A targets included the DRA Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Communications, the General Staff, the HQ of the Air Force and the Central army Corps and military intelligence. B targets were the radio-television center, the post and telegraph office.⁹⁰

While finishing this chapter, I raised the practical question as to why the history of the Amin overthrow was much shorter than its Mossadegh counterpart but then I realized that this was attributable to the intentional short duration of events: a swift and violent overthrow by external forces that did not employ any means of white or black propaganda to ease the transition and compliance to the new Karmal government.⁹¹ And while some of the operation’s veterans characterize it as ‘one of the most successful operations in the world’, it would end up being only the opening act for the USSR’s biggest military catastrophe.⁹² That, however, is the history for another paper.

on the palace. Robertson, William Glenn, and Lawrence A. Yates. 2003. Block by block: the challenges of urban operations. Fort Leavenworth, Kan: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press. 303

⁸⁹ "Report on the Situation in Afghanistan, Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev to CPSU CC, 27-28 December 1979," December 31, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI (formerly TsKhSD)

⁹⁰ ЦіаРховскіі, А. А. 46

⁹¹ Grau employs the term ‘coup de main’ to emphasize the suddenness and violence of such a move. Lester W. Grau. 2002 The Take-Down of Kabul: An Effective Coup de Main in Urban Operations: An Historical Casebook, Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

⁹² Dmitry, Volin. “A participant in the assault on Amin's palace: we were under direct machine gun fire.” TASS, December 25 2019: <https://n.tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7414989> (translated from Russian)

Chapter 4: Discussion & Conclusion

As mentioned above, one of the main criticisms regarding Graham's approach was its American-centric perception of bureaucratic politics. However, at least in the case of my research, the employed paradigm seems to have a broader application: In spite of the great differences in the political systems and the ideological undertones between the United States and the Soviet Union, I could find many similarities regarding the decision-making process in foreign policy and clandestine operations.

The two 'action-channels' AKA the National Security Council and the Politburo might differ in their de jure significance and their modus operandi as the NSC is more of an advisory body and the Politburo is the highest decision-making organ of the CPSU, but when examined a common pattern emerges: In both cases, the executive leaders call the shots depending on the information provided by the civilian intelligence agencies. Likewise, the leaders of the CIA and KGB either completely falsify or distort the provided intel to create a specific situation that justifies the course of action that they seek to pursue in the first case: in our case the overthrow of the Mossadegh and the Amin government.

The said circumstances entail the inevitable loss of the country, the undesirable administrations are leading, to the ideological nemesis of the intervening power: Mossadegh as a communist stooge/weak dictator who will one way or another lead to a communist takeover of Iran and Amin, the CIA spy who would compromise a centuries old security buffer to the imperialists.⁹³ Another crucial similarity which is interconnected with Graham's approach are the emerging groups within the 'action channels': On the one hand, the Dulles Brothers, their personal relation and dominance in the foreign policy apparatus during the Eisenhower administration, on the other the Andropov-Ustinov-Gromyko troika that set the agenda in the politburo during the later Brezhnev period.

Other than the obvious aforementioned differentiation regarding the de jure significance of the two decision making bodies, the incentives of the players should

⁹³ An interesting quasi-repetition of history can be traced in the justification for Soviet-Intervention. Just as the Andropov warning of potential installation of short-ranged missile systems in Afghanistan worked as a catalyst for the invasion, the potential inclusion of Ukraine in the NATO missile defense system and overall defense framework was a main propaganda argument by Putin before and during the invasion.

also be considered: while both Dulles and Andropov sought to promote their personal foreign policy agendas and involve their agencies, Andropov had another personal power struggle to consider: it has already been stated that a Politburo majority can elect a Soviet Premier and the loss thereof can lead to his downfall. By establishing and solidifying his own internal bloc within the organ, Andropov would eventually manage to attain the majority that would achieve his election after Brezhnev's passing.⁹⁴ Allen Dulles did not have such political aspirations.

When comparing the coups' execution, it is crucial to examine the operational autonomy shown (or not shown) at an operational level. Whereas, in the Iranian case, the main chief of operations went against the orders from the Headquarters which demanded immediate withdrawal, Storm 333 proceeded in accordance to the instructions provided by the civil and military leadership. There are two likely explanations regarding this lack of autonomy in the Soviet case: The overthrow of Amin was a military operation with direct involvement of Soviet military units and as a result, the operational autonomy that one might connect with a field agent was absent. Unlike, the Iranian case, where a small group of agents pulled the strings 'behind the scenes' and could blend in with the mobs of Tehran, a surgical strike at the organizational heart of Afghanistan required precise coordination among the participating combatants who had to do the dirty work themselves. The second operational reason is connected with the first: the Soviet soldiers had been deployed directly from the neighboring southern border of the Soviet Union and were under the orders of their military leaders who in turn had a direct line of communication with the Kremlin. The CIA team in Tehran relied on a telegraph system to communicate with HQ with a significant time delay due to the time difference with the United States. It was this window of opportunity that Roosevelt exploited to do things his way.

If we consider the very definition of a coup d'état and the direct goal it evangelizes, both coups were successful. Both of the desired replacements were put in place of the 'persona non grata'. As Luttwak affirms, the quintessence of a successful coup is its swiftness and bloodlessness.⁹⁵ In both cases, while the exact number of casualties remains contested, the main coup phase was complete within a day (August 19th 1953

⁹⁴ Brown, Archie. 1984. "The Soviet Succession: From Andropov to Chernenko." *World Today*, Apr 01, 134.

⁹⁵ Luttwak, 2016. 16

and December 27th 1979). The exact opposite would be the situation to degenerate into a civil war.⁹⁶ Taking this criterion into account, one could make the argument that the Soviet coup was a failure, since the 10-year conflict that ensued has been described as a civil war between the ‘legitimate’ Kabul government that received Soviet support in accordance with the 1978 Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty and the Mujahideen resistance.⁹⁷ On the contrary, Iran would evolve into the closest partner of the West in the Middle East under the Shah’s autocracy and a 1954 deal that gave a 50-50 share to Iran and a Consortium of US and British companies, the door was firmly closed to Soviet expansion in the area.⁹⁸

Could this longer survival of the Pahlavi regime be attributed to the practices employed by the coup conspirators? As mentioned before, a months-long preparatory phase focused on white and black propaganda aimed at discrediting Mossadegh and justifying the necessity for his overthrow by Zahedi and the return to power of the ‘revered’ Shah. On the case of Afghanistan, no such efforts were actively made. Instead brute force was used by the Soviets to simply oust Amin and replace him by an exiled politician who was rejected from the start by the local populous as a communist puppet. I should point out that drawing a direct causal effect between the methods employed before and during the coup and the survival of the ‘replacing regime’ is not my intention but a potential correlation could be the subject of further research.

The question of how ‘successful’ the interventionist role of the CIA in Iran becomes even more ambiguous if we extend its lasting effect on US-Iran relations. The 1953 coup put an end to what has been described as Iran’s ‘brief experiment with democracy’.⁹⁹ Abrahamian posits that the dismantling of political parties such as the Tudeh and the National Front created a political vacuum that was filled by radical elements that would eventually carry out the 1979 revolution and forge a collective

⁹⁶ *ibid*

⁹⁷ Liakhovsky, Alexander. “The Civil War in Afghanistan General Major.” (2002).

⁹⁸ Heiss, Mary Ann. “The United States, Great Britain, and the Creation of the Iranian Oil Consortium, 1953-1954.” *The International History Review* 16, no. 3 (1994): 511–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40107317>.

⁹⁹ Robert, Scheer. “The Moment the US Ended Iran’s Brief Experiment in Democracy”. *The Nation* August 20 2013 <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/moment-us-ended-irans-brief-experiment-democracy/>

consciousness with a powerful anti-american sentiment that exists to this day.¹⁰⁰ Engaging in counterfactuals is not a reliable scientific method and we cannot just consider Mossadegh's democratization efforts teleological. However, one cannot help but wonder how different the political landscape of Iran and the whole Middle East would be if a moderate democratically-elected leader had stayed in power.

The 1953 coup was an undeniable game changer for US foreign policy. One must only consider the personal perspective of President Eisenhower, to comprehend how big of a success operation AJAX was at the time: as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, he had come to know firsthand the highest toll of blood, materiel and money required to overthrow a government in the old way of 'sending in the cavalry'. In Iran a bit more than 1,000,000\$ and a small team of agents was all it took to oust a government hostile to US interests without having to deploy a single marine. The next target was Guatemala in 1954 and this 'recipe of success' would continue until the 1961 blunder at the Bay of Pigs.

The failure of the US inter-branch effort to overthrow Castro was blamed on our person of interest, Allen Dulles whose career in the CIA ended because of this event. However, until his point of resignation, he continued to play a central role in the formulation and execution of US foreign policy. It should be noted that one must be cautious not to enter a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories that usually interconnect intelligence agencies with rogue actions. Instead, by using factual evidence such the declassified CIA documents that have been used in this paper and the very existence of a President's Commission on CIA Activities within the United States which prosecuted CIA unauthorized and illegal activities, we can comprehend how the intelligence apparatus can discreetly pull the strings from its privileged position within the deep state.

The main obstacle was the limited amount of primary sources due to the sensitive nature of the examined events and the clandestine modus operandi of the instigating actors. One can only hope that future researchers will revisit this intriguing subject as more relevant material becomes declassified or/and leaked.

Finally, while the validity of historic recurrence is not the subject of this dissertation, it was while writing this epilogue that I stumbled upon the contemporary political

¹⁰⁰ Abrahamian, 2015. 206

situation of Iran and a furious Ayatollah Ali Khomeini who accused foreign elements behind public riots in the country and pointed the finger at the ‘Americans and the Westerners who think they can make the Iranian nation oppose the Islamic Republic’.¹⁰¹ This statement made by such a significant voice in modern Iranian society reflects how these events have been engraved in the national consciousness of the two countries and accentuates how further research is necessary in presenting their consequences to this day.

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¹⁰¹ "Iran's Khomeini accuses 'enemy' of stirring up protests" BBC News, June 4 2022, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61690379>

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