



HARRIMAN MISSION

HARRIMAN MISSION, the mission of American diplomat W. Averell Harriman, who was sent to Tehran in July 1951 to mediate between Persia and Great Britain in the wake of the Persian nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. American fears of the consequences of deadlock in negotiations and of the possibility of British military action against Persia, which could provoke Soviet intervention, resulted in President Truman's dispatch of Harriman, the veteran diplomat, to Tehran. Harriman had been ambassador to both London and Moscow. He had accompanied President Franklin D. Roosevelt on his trip to Persia in November-December 1943 to attend the Tehran Conference with Allied leaders Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. While United States ambassador to Moscow, Harriman had again briefly visited Tehran in December 1944 during the crisis caused by the Soviet demand for an oil concession (Lytle, p. 115, pp. 123-24). Described as "the inveterate presidential envoy and master diplomat" (Bill, 20), he was reputed to be a skillful and efficient negotiator.

Although personally reluctant and pessimistic (Elm, p. 125, Lytle, p. 201), Harriman led a mission which included Walter Levy, an oil expert, and Vernon Walters, a diplomat and interpreter. They arrived in Tehran on 23 Tir 1330 Š./15 July 1951, amid violent demonstrations organized by the Tudeh Party in which anti-Tudeh *agents provocateurs* also played a role. Upon arriving in Tehran he declared that his purpose was to "reconcile logic and feelings" (*Bāktar-e Emruz*, 26 Tir 1330 Š./18 July 1951). Many, if not most, British officials, including Herbert Morrison, the Foreign Secretary, and



particularly Sir Francis Shepherd, the ambassador to Tehran, were opposed to the mission. In Morrison's judgement, the belief that the British and the Americans disagreed on the manner of settling the Anglo-Persian oil dispute, and that the United States would help Persia to ward off communism, strengthened premier Moḥammad Moṣaddeq's position. The general British view was that the longer the Persians were deprived of oil revenues the more amenable they would be to accepting a settlement beneficial to Britain. Shepherd feared that hopes raised by the Harriman mission would dishearten the domestic anti-Moṣaddeq opposition, while believing that Harriman's failure would seriously undermine Moṣaddeq's position in the parliament (UK. P.R.O. Shepherd to FO, 30 July 1951, FO 371, 91462).

In the course of his trip, Harriman met many men of influence including the shah, Court Minister Ḥoseyn 'Alā', senior parliamentarians, Ayatollah Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšāni, who was then an ally of Moṣaddeq, and of course Prime Minister Moṣaddeq and some of his colleagues (Walters, pp. 241-63). Moṣaddeq's government warmly welcomed American mediation, expressing optimism about the outcome of negotiations with Harriman (*Bāktar-e Emruz*, 30 Tir 1330 Š./22 July 1951). Harriman came to realize that the nationalization movement had wide public support and that no Persian government could act contrary to the strong public feelings against the AIOC and British officials (Elm, pp. 130-31). He feared that British intransigence might benefit the Soviets. On the other hand, he did not fail to impress upon Moṣaddeq and his advisers the major problems involved in selling oil in international markets, reminding them that Persia could not sell her oil by herself. He also emphasized that the Persian government could not hope for a settlement which would upset oil arrangements elsewhere or entitle Persia to more than 50 percent of oil revenues (Elm, p. 130; Mowaḥḥed, p. 209).

Against a backdrop of British reluctance or opposition, Harriman continued his efforts to pave the way for direct negotiations between the Persian and British governments. He succeeded in securing the agreement of Moṣaddeq and his colleagues to negotiate directly with high-level representatives of the British Government acting on behalf of the Company. They insisted that as a precondition the British should formally recognize the principle of nationalization as promulgated by the law of 20 March 1951; the Persian government would then be ready to negotiate implementation of the law in so far as it affected "British interests" (Elm, p. 131). Harriman saw no conflict between the British recognition of nationalization as a "principle" and the



affirmation of an arrangement which in essence entitled them to half of the oil revenues.

Harriman decided to visit Britain despite Shepherd's maneuver to undermine his efforts and the Foreign Office message that his trip would not serve "a really useful purpose" (Elm, p. 132). On 27 July 1951 he flew to London to discuss the issues with the British cabinet and before returning to Tehran four days later succeeded in persuading Prime Minister Clement Attlee to dispatch a delegation to Persia without setting preconditions. The British government delegation, led by Richard Stokes, Lord Privy Seal, arrived in Tehran on 4 August 1951. The British government now recognized the principle of nationalization but expected that in return the Persian government "should forgo its insistence on that principle" (Elwell-Sutton, p. 252). The Stokes-led delegation proved unprepared to deviate substantially from proposals put forward in June 1951 by Basil Jackson, a senior official of the AIOC, which the British government and the Company regarded as "generous" (Elm, p. 131). Among other things, Stokes and his colleagues insisted on arrangements that would ensure effective British control over the production and marketing of Persian oil.

In the eyes of Moşaddeq and his advisers such proposals were in effect the same as those put forward by Jackson; they were incompatible with the substance of nationalization, and even worse than a 50/50 split of profits, because Persia would have had to pay compensation as well (Ruhāni, 1987, pp. 296-97; Elm, pp. 137-38). Despite Harriman's efforts for the continuation of negotiations, Stokes returned to London on 23 August. Harriman left for London the next day. The British cabinet resorted to further sanctions against Persia in addition to the already enforced boycott of Persian oil. Upon his arrival in London, Harriman unsuccessfully tried to encourage continued negotiations with Moşaddeq. He also warned that economic sanctions or military pressure "would stiffen the Persians" (Elm, p. 143), and by creating greater antagonism would drive Persia towards the Soviet Union (Lytle, pp. 201-2).

Harriman privately blamed the failure of his mission largely on Moşaddeq's refusal "to face realities" (The Special Assistant to the President [Harriman] to the Department of State, Tehran, 23 August 1951, 888/2553/ 8-2351: telegram, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, pp. 147-48; Goode, p. 42); he seemed to have come to share the British view that negotiating a "reason-able agreement" with Moşaddeq was impossible (George McGhee, "Recollections of



Dr Muhammad Musaddiq,” in Bill and Louis, eds., p. 297). He was unable or unprepared to view the oil dispute in its complex historical context and his dispatches “revealed little sense of bitterness” characterizing Anglo-Persian relations. (Goode, p. 44). In the eyes of Henry Grady, American Ambassador to Tehran since June 1950, the Persians “rightly or wrongly considered that Harriman was very much on [the] British side. This was inevitable due to [the] fact that he [Harriman] and Levy urged in their private discussions acceptance of fundamentals of [the] British offer and continued negotiation with regards to details” (The Ambassador in Iran [Grady] to the Department of State, Tehran, 27 August 1951, 888.10/8-2751: telegram, in Foreign Relations of the United States, pp. 149-50). Grady appealed to the US government to resist British pressures and maintain a position of “basic friendliness” towards Persia (ibid.). He himself left Persia on 19 September to be replaced a few days later by Loy Henderson, who, unlike his predecessor, showed increasing willingness to sympathize and cooperate with Moşaddeq’s British and domestic opponents. In the wake of the failure of Harriman’s mission, the British intensified their efforts to undermine Moşaddeq, isolate Persia, and win unequivocal and open American support in their confrontation with Persia, while the Persian Government endeavored to show that the Americans were unprepared to abandon their mediating efforts.

The predominant view in Britain was that no settlement was possible as long as Moşaddeq remained in power. For Shepherd, and Robin Zaehner, who played a key role in coordinating the anti-Moşaddeq campaign inside Persia, “until we [the British] made it perfectly plain that we see no possibility of reaching an agreement with Dr. Mossadeq, the growing opposition of (sic) him will be unwilling to commit themselves to the point of bringing about his overthrow” (UK. P.R.O. FO minute, 29 August 1951, FO 371/ 91462).

Harriman performed other missions to Persia: in March 1961 he was dispatched to Tehran by President John F. Kennedy to discuss the shah’s request for increased American military and economic aid (Bill, p. 138). Also, between May 1965 and November 1967, during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, Harriman undertook “four important presidential missions” to the country, playing an important role in liaising between Johnson and the shah (Bill, pp. 169, 177).



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