

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

Radio Tehran and the 19 August 1953 Coup: A New Perspective

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“By the time we had Radio Teheran we were in.”¹

As in other coups d'état of the pre-Internet era, the national radio was an important element in the developments of August 1953 in Iran. According to Donald Wilber, “Radio Tehran was a most important target, for its capture not only sealed the success at the capital, but was effective in bringing the provincial cities quickly into line with the new government.”² The capture of the radio headquarters in Tehran and the address made by General Fazlullah Zahedi from its microphones marked a turning point in the second, successful overthrow initiative. Yet the broadcasting of Radio Tehran on that and preceding days has received little attention in scholarly accounts of the coup. This is primarily due to the paucity of source material available. Studies published in Iran on the history of radio do not appear to have benefited from access to radio archives.³ Mervyn Roberts has made use of only one of two accessible repositories of Iranian radio content of the time, namely the American Foreign Broadcast Information Services (FBIS), to provide an insightful account of the period surrounding the August coup.⁴ Ali Rahnema provides an account of military maneuvers to capture the radio installations on 19 August and supplies a partially accurate list of the speakers who took turns proclaiming the downfall of Mosaddeq. He does not provide insight into the content of the radio transmissions nor their precise timing.⁵ Donald Wilber's famous internal CIA history of the coup broadly mentions salient moments in the 19 August broadcasts but presents inaccurate times for at least some of these. Another CIA internal study authored by Scott Koch makes extensive use of the agency's own monitoring of Radio Tehran but is available only in heavily redacted form.⁶

¹ Kermit Roosevelt, Meeting at the Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC, 28 August 1953, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Iran, 1951–1954*, 2nd ed., ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 2017), 742.

² Donald Wilber, *Clandestine Service History: Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952–August 1953* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1954), 70.

³ For a social history of the national radio, see Riza Mukhtari Isfahani, *Tarikh-i Tahavulat-i Ijtima'i-yi Radiyu dar Iran* (Tehran: Daftar-i Pizhuhishha-yi Radiyu, 2009); and for a history of the radio until 1979, Riza Mukhtari Isfahani, *Sarguzasht-i Radiyu dar Iran Bih Rivayat-i Asnad (1310–1357 Sh.)* (Tehran: Tarh-i Ayandah, 2009).

⁴ Mervyn Roberts, “Analysis of Radio Propaganda in the 1953 Iran Coup,” *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 6 (2012): 770–77.

⁵ See in particular the section “Tehran Radio Falls” in Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 222–24, in which the times of the takeover of the radio studios and Zahedi's speech are provided in broad approximate ranges.

⁶ There are various available versions of Koch's study. “CIA Declassifies More of ‘Zendeabad, Shah!': Internal Study of 1953 Iran Coup,” National Security Archive, 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iran/2018-02-12/cia-declassifies-more-zendeabad-shah-internal-study-1953-iran-coup>.

This essay augments the work of Rahnema and Roberts by drawing on both the FBIS and its British counterpart, the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), as well as Persian sources, to piece together a new perspective on Radio Tehran during the turbulent removal from power of Mosaddeq, and to elaborate the ways in which scrutiny of its broadcasts provides further understanding of some dimensions of the August 1953 coup d'état.

Radio Tehran on the Eve of the August Crisis

The Mosaddeq government had firm control over national radio facilities in the first half of August 1953. Supervision over the technical arm—the Pahlavi wireless installation on the Old Shimiran Road—and the studio at Arg Square in central Tehran was formally assigned to the head of the government's Propaganda and Publicity Department, 'Ali Akbar Bashir Farahmand, who was based in a neighboring building at Arg. The Mosaddeq administration made extensive use of the radio to amplify the reach of the progovernment meetings held in Tehran and the content of the allied press. In addition to the prime minister's important addresses to the nation, the editorials of *Bakhtar-i Imruz* (Today's West), the main progovernment daily newspaper, and other supportive publications were more accessible in a country with high illiteracy rates. *Bakhtar-i Imruz's* editorials, which were often penned by its fiery owner and editor, Husayn Fatimi, benefited from special treatment and were frequently broadcast in full outside the habitual press review. This often happened at the prime time 9 p.m. slot and also occasionally was translated into foreign languages.⁷

Available documents show that Bashir Farahmand firmly believed in strict governmental control over the radio. For example, on 15 May 1952 the head of the national gendarmerie notified Mosaddeq that, as agreed previously, the body's radio station would begin broadcasting the following day. Its programming would focus on matters pertaining to the gendarmerie, as well as society, public health, and music.⁸ Farahmand strenuously opposed such a development, arguing that the granting of such a request would result in all other state bodies making similar requests and generating an unsustainable level of expenditure.⁹ Mosaddeq eventually ensured an effective government monopoly over the radio.¹⁰ An American embassy assessment at the same time noted that as long as Mosaddeq was in control of Radio Tehran it was "difficult to see how can easily be overthrown."¹¹

The government made robust use of the radio during the mass resignation of National Front-aligned majlis deputies in late July 1953 and the anniversary of the 30 Tir (21 July 1952) uprising, which was commemorated by two separate meetings in Baharistan Square, a larger one featuring supporters of the communist Tudeh Party and a lesser one held by the arc of Mosaddeqist formations. Radio Tehran produced a special feature entitled "Blood and Freedom," which claimed that Mosaddeq's premiership had ended the suffering caused by British encroachment in Iran. The speech by Mosaddeq's close adviser, Sayyid 'Ali Shayigan, was broadcast together with those of lesser-known figures, such as a worker aligned with the Third Force warning "Eisenhower and others that neither dollars nor ideological propaganda would be successful in restoring British supremacy in Persia." A political commentary on the 30 Tir anniversary event broadcast during the main news bulletin at 2 p.m. noted how the "blood spilt in the streets of Tehran on the 30th Tir once again irrigated

⁷ For court deposition of Bashir Farahmand, see Jalil Buzurgmihir, ed., *Muhammad Musaddiq dar Mahkamah-i Nizami*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran, 1985), 529. There are several examples of 9 p.m. extended readings of *Bakhtar-i Imruz* editorials, for example the one concerning the dissolution of the majlis on 25 July, or another one focusing on the audience of the US general Norman Schwarzkopf with the shah at 8:30 p.m. on 4 August.

⁸ National Gendarmerie commander Colonel Vusuq, letter to Mosaddeq, in *Asnadi az Tarikhchah-i Radiyu dar Iran (1318-45 H. Sh.)* (Tehran: Sazman-i Chap va Intisharat, Vizarat-i Farhang va Irshad-i Islami, 2000), 392.

⁹ Bashir Farahmand letter to Mosaddeq, *ibid.*, 394.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 400.

¹¹ James C. Van Hook, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 2017), 229.

the roots of the Persian national movement,” and how twelve months later “still the traitors and criminals are active and try to ruin the country for their master’s benefit.”¹² Similar to other meetings of the time, the rally was not covered live by the radio, due to the lack of technical means to do so. Instead, the event was recorded and broadcast between 2:10 and 4:45 pm, thereby coinciding with the Tudeh meeting.¹³

The station also transmitted a long statement of Mosaddeq to the nation on July 20, in which he called upon his supporters to “not allow our treacherous opponent to snatch our decisive weapon from our hand and to embroil us with one another by so creating discord and disunity.” Also featured was an interview with the head of the Third Force, Khalil Maliki, two days earlier, in which he called on “committees of the national movement” to be established in factories and offices, as well as villages and towns, and to levy additional taxes on the rich as a way to combat the influence and ambitions of “agents of colonialism.”¹⁴

Radio Tehran played a significant role in the organization of the referendum for the dissolution of the majlis on August 3. In another speech on July 27 the prime minister asserted that it was “regrettable that the Majlis, which should be the focus of the struggle to achieve our aspirations, has been made the centre for the furthering of the horrifying designs of the foreigners” and concluded, “The people are asked if they agree. . . with the present Government and its aims, they must give their agreement to the dissolution of the Majlis in order that a Majlis capable of working with the government in the execution of the people’s will may be brought into existence.”¹⁵

In the run-up to the referendum, the radio broadcast appeals by formations in favor of Mosaddeq’s move and reassured voters that producing identification documents was not necessary.¹⁶ It also provided other notable details, for instance, the endeavor of a thousand women who went downtown to the working-class Rah-i Ahān (Railway) Square, one of the venues where affirmative ballots were to be cast and proceeded to “write ballot papers for men who could not write,” because of the ongoing lack of female suffrage.¹⁷ The radio also omitted any mention of Ayatollah Abulqasim Kashani’s call for a boycott of the vote and uncritically reported the official results.

Radio Tehran and the First Coup Attempt

The first attempt to unseat Mosaddeq in the early hours of 25 Mordad/August 16 occurred at a time when the government continued to make extensive use of radio facilities. Bashir Farahmand was informed from Mosaddeq’s residence that a coup attempt had occurred, and was summoned to the prime minister’s residence, where he was shown the *farmān* (order) dismissing Mosaddeq that was delivered by Colonel Nasiri of the Imperial Guard.

The first challenge both Farahmand and the team clustered at Mosaddeq’s residence had to contend with was the sudden interruption to the supply of electricity in an area including both the Arg Square studios and Mosaddeq’s residence on Kakh Street, which was put into place by Colonel Husayn Azmudih, who would later serve as military prosecutor in Mosaddeq’s trial. Farahmand was summoned to Mosaddeq’s residence with his technical staff, as the prime minister intended to record a brief address to the nation through

¹² Radio Tehran commentary, 24 July, as summarized in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (hereafter SWB), part 4, no. 384, 31 July 1953, 53–54. All times in this article refer to local Tehran time; the BBC and the American Foreign Broadcast Information Services (hereafter FBIS) deployed GMT (Greenwich Meridian Time) in their reports.

¹³ Description of the 21 July broadcasts from BBC SWB, part 4, no. 383, 28 July 1953. The choice to engage in the extended reproduction of the Mosaddeqist rally was probably deliberate and designed to diminish the Tudeh rally, which did not receive any coverage on Radio Tehran.

¹⁴ Mosaddeq and Maliki’s speeches as covered in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 382, 28 July 1953.

¹⁵ Mosaddeq’s radio address on 27 June 1953 as translated in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 384, 31 July 1953, 49–52.

¹⁶ Details of broadcasts on preparations for the referendum, 1 and 2 August, in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 386, 7 August 1953, 47.

¹⁷ Radio Tehran report on 3 August, as reported in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 387, 11 August 1953.

which he would tender his resignation, thereby replicating the stance he took on the eve of the July 1952 uprising.¹⁸

However, this position was strongly opposed by some of Mosaddeq's advisers and the foreign minister and government spokesman Fatimi, who had by then been released from captivity imposed by the plotters and had made it to the residence in a ragged state. The decision was made instead to read a government communiqué over the radio. Farahmand received the text over the phone at the headquarters of the Pahlavi wireless, the technical arm of Radio Tehran, on the Old Shimiran Road, to which he had relocated because of the lack of electricity at Arg Square. The communiqué consisted of a brief description of Nasiri's arrival at Mosaddeq's residence and the temporary arrest of Fatimi, Zirakzadih, and officers loyal to the prime minister.¹⁹ At 12:04 pm, it was announced that due to the overwhelming popular support for Mosaddeq in the referendum, the seventeenth majlis was to be considered dissolved, with elections for the eighteenth to be held in the near future.²⁰ Around half an hour later, the invitations of the former Nihzat-i Milli parliamentary faction, the Asnaf (trade guilds) of Tehran, and the Third Force and Iran parties urging the people to join a meeting at 5:30 pm at Baharistan were read out.²¹

The Baharistan gathering was recorded and later replayed almost in full. As correctly noted by BBC monitoring, "while there were repeated cheers for Mosaddeq's 'victory,' there was no indication of any demand for the establishment of a republic." However, according to the radio commentary, the crowd shouted "Death to the shah" during the address by Shayigan, who pleaded to no avail for the crowd to keep calm. Fatimi, who was loudly acclaimed by the crowd, called the "overthrown" court of Pahlavi a "British spy den." The commentator further noted that everyone in the square raised their hand when asked to approve the resolution of the meeting, which called upon the government to punish all those responsible for the overthrow attempt and set up a special court.²² Radio Tehran rounded out this extraordinary day of programming by reading out a Reuters report on a "secret meeting" held by Zahedi, in which he presented the *farmān* confirming him as prime minister and the first of three incendiary editorials against the shah penned by Fatimi in *Bakhtar-i Imruz*.²³ Provincial radio stations also relayed news of support for Mosaddeq. Sanandaj radio reported on support messages sent to the prime minister from the Hizb-i Sa'adat-i Milli, a Sunni leader, Shaykh Hesami, and other Kurdish notables.

Radio Tehran continued to uphold the government line on August 17, particularly through the second of Fatimi's infamous editorials and his press conference as foreign minister in which he confirmed the flight of the shah and his wife to Baghdad. The habitual evening religious programming was entrusted to a cleric closely linked to the Grand Ayatollah Husayn Burujirdi, Sadraddin Sadr-i Balaqi, who delivered a strong anti-shah address. Sadr-i Balaqi is

¹⁸ Interview with Bashir Farahmand in *Parkhash*, 30 Mordad 1358/21 August 1979.

¹⁹ According to Farahmand's interview with *Parkhash*, he received the communiqué at 6 a.m. In his court deposition, he gives the time of his telephone conversation with Fatemi as 7:10 a.m. The first capture of the declaration, which was read several times over Radio Tehran during the morning of 16 August, by FBIS and BBC SWB was at 7:15 a.m. Fatemi to a great extent confirmed these times in his press conference on the afternoon of 16 August. According to a CIA history of the coup, a first announcement on the foiling of the first coup attempt was read out on Radio Tehran at 5:45 a.m.; Scott Koch, *Zendeabad Shah!* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), 50.

²⁰ Radio Tehran announcement in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 390, 50. Following the referendum, Mosaddeq initially sought to obtain the dissolution of the majlis through a royal decree, as mandated by the constitution. His decision to press ahead with the unilateral dissolution of the parliament on 16 August was motivated by his inability to receive an answer from the shah after the referendum results were announced and his doubts about the authenticity of the *farmān* delivered by Nasiri. See Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, "Down With the Monarchy: Iran's Republican Moment of August 1953," *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2017): 293–313, for a more extended discussion of this meeting and other key political developments of those days.

²¹ Radio Tehran announcements in BBC SWB, part 4, no. 390, 56–58. The broadcasts of 16 August would later feature as part of the prosecution against Mosaddeq at his military trial.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

considered by clerical historians such as Sayyid Hadi Khusrawshahi to have been a personal representative of Burujirdi during the Mosaddeq period, but the extent to which he was talking on behalf of his mentor on this occasion is unclear. He also was close to the Khudaparastan-i Susyalist and the Iran Party. He gave a speech at the latter's club on August 18, during celebrations for the assumed neutralization of the plot against Mosaddeq.²⁴ Referring to Islam's opposition to idolatry, Balaqi noted how "people used to worship their kings, and they believed that the Shah was a representative of God. This belief had always brought misery and poverty to the people of Iran because the Shahs of Iran have always been selfish dictators."²⁵

The radio programming on August 18 carried several important announcements by the military governor of Tehran, Colonel Ashrafi, which were read out on the 2 p.m. main news bulletin. Martial rule communiqués 40 to 42 put a price on the head of Zahedi, summoned the other prominent putschist officer 'Abbas Farzanigan for interrogation and, most crucially, announced that "any kind of demonstration without prior permission of the Military Government is forbidden, and that the law and order authorities have been instructed to arrest the offenders and prosecute them according to the laws."²⁶ According to a young Tudeh activist of the time, Ashrafi summoned representatives from the various groups active on the streets, including Tudeh front organizations such as the Jami'at-i Milli-yi Mubarizah ba Isti'mar (National Society for Resistance to Colonialism) to personally announce "Mosaddeq's order."²⁷ This decision, which also resulted in the arrest of hundreds of Tudeh Party activists on the streets of Tehran in the following hours, was conducive to the streets of Tehran being empty of government supporters on the morning of August 19.

Radio Tehran on the Day of the Successful Coup

There is little indication that the key installations of Radio Tehran were subject to heightened defense on August 19. The morning programming was bland and disconnected from the heady events of the past few days, and provided a combination of agricultural news and music, which was reproduced until approximately 2 p.m.²⁸ Ghulam-Husayn Sadiqi, the interior minister and close Mosaddeq associate, recalled that after hearing about the capture of the main telephone exchange by the putschists at 1 p.m., he phoned the prime minister from the Interior Ministry, pressed him to order strengthening the defense of the telegraph and radio buildings "in any way possible," and reminded him that the fall of either would be conducive to a near-instant breakup of law of order across the entire country. He reiterated this when he reached Mosaddeq's residence shortly before 3 p.m., but such plans were thrown out by the convulsive takeover of Radio Tehran.²⁹

²⁴ *Haftad Sal Paydari: Khatirat-i Husayn Shah Husayni 1320-1360* (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 2015), 192. Sadr-i Balaqi would retain close public ties with the National Front after the coup, acting for example as the main orator at the fortieth day mourning service for the prominent National Front figure Mahmud Nariman in 1961. *Ibid.*, 293-94.

²⁵ Radio Tehran broadcast at 8 p.m. on 17 August, as translated in FBIS Daily Report, no. 161, 18 August 1953, QQ7.

²⁶ Radio Tehran broadcast at 2 p.m. on 18 August, as reproduced in FBIS Daily Report, no. 161. The genesis of this deeply consequential ban on demonstrations has been discussed in Randjbar-Daemi, "Down With the Monarchy," 304-5. The radio announcement was accompanied by the publication of the same text in the afternoon dailies *Kayhan*, *Ittila'at*, and *Bakhtar-i Imruz* and clarifies that this decision and announcement were made at least four hours prior to Mosaddeq's meeting with US Ambassador Loy Henderson at 6 p.m.

²⁷ Parviz Baba'i, "Nigahi Digar bih Kudita-i 28 Murdad," *Andishah-yi Jamiyih* 12 (2000). This meeting ostensibly took place following the broadcast. The record of Ashrafi in those crucial days is checked. An instant investigation by the Mosaddeqist officer Isma'il 'Imiyah of the 16 August attempt concluded that he was in league with the plotters and recommended his arrest to the prime minister on 18 August. He was replaced with Mosaddeq's relative and secretive plotter Muhammad Daftari the following day. His name is present on the list of military officers who remained loyal to Mosaddeq in later accounts, such as the table prepared by *Ittila'at* on 19 August 1979.

²⁸ According to a pro-coup newspaper, the highlight of the morning's programming was an interview with Labor Minister Ibrahim 'Alimi on cotton. *Dad*, 29 Mordad 1332/20 August 1953. This is confirmed by Wilber, *Overthrow*, 71.

²⁹ Ghulam-Husayn Sadiqi, "28 va 29-i Mordad," in *Yadnamah-i Duktur Ghulam-Husayn Sadiqi: Farzananah-i Iran Zamin*, ed. Parviz Varjavand (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1993), 123-24.

The Wilber report states that instructions to encourage the capture of the Radio Tehran buildings were provided to both the British and American lead agents by 10 a.m.³⁰ The pattern through which the two main buildings of Radio Tehran were occupied by the pro-coup crowd has been variously discussed in often contradictory narratives in royalist books and press accounts. According to one of these accounts, the soldiers who were defending the Arg Square building either fled or joined the rebellious crowd when faced with its determination to break into the radio studios.³¹ The Arg studio was taken off air by the intentional severing of its link with the Pahlavi wireless. The crowd was then dissuaded from ransacking its premises and directed toward the Old Shimiran installation.³² Sayyid Mihdi Mirashrafi, the editor of the strenuously anti-Mosaddeq daily *Atash* (Fire) claims to have been at the helm of the capture of the Pahlavi wireless and to have convinced the officer in charge of its defense to cease his resistance in exchange for an amnesty. Mirashrafi stated that he reached its main studio along with a large crowd at 3 p.m., only to find out that this transmitter had, too, been sabotaged by a progovernment technician.³³

According to both BBC and FBIS reports, Radio Tehran came back on air after a 90-minute interruption at 3:33 p.m. Amid considerable commotion, an unidentified speaker announced that the “treacherous Government of Mossadeq has started a battle against our Constitution and our National Government. We people of Teheran have now captured the Teheran radio, and we have overthrown the treacherous Government of Mosaddeq, which was directed by traitors such as Fatemi. People of the provinces should now rise in body and oust all the authorities of the treacherous Government.”³⁴ The *farmān* appointing Zahedi as prime minister, which had been published by the anti-Mosaddeq press since the previous day, was among the first items to be read out.

The first identified speaker was Colonel ‘Ali Pahlavan, who claimed that Fatimi “tried to sell our 6,000-year-old homeland to foreigners” and called on the nation to observe the slogan “Khuda, Shah, Mihan” (God, the Shah, the Nation).³⁵ He was followed by a speaker introduced as the editor of the journal *Bakhtiyar*, who proclaimed that the “corrupt, treacherous government led by Fatemi has crashed.”

After a few other military and lay speakers it was the turn of the former majlis deputy and lawyer Sayyid Mihdi Pirastih, who came on air at around 4:10 p.m. after the national anthem brought an end to an intermission to clear the raucous crowds. He claimed that Mosaddeq had deceived himself and many deputies when he presented his oil nationalization bill at the sixteenth majlis. Pirastih also revealed that the new prime minister, Zahedi, would release a message by the evening and would “eliminate the traitors,” despite asking the populace not to engage in summarily punishing them.³⁶ Ahmad Faramarzi, a firebrand anti-Mosaddeq

³⁰ Wilber, *Overthrow*, 67. These were respectively the Rashidian brothers and the Jalali-Kayvani duo, whose agency has been described extensively by Rahnema.

³¹ Ahmad Bani-Ahmad and Mansur-Ali Atabaki, *Rastakhiz-i Millat-i Iran: Panj ruz-i Murdad Mah-i 1332* (Tehran: 1958), 208.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Qiyam dar Rah-i Saltanat*, 9 *Isfand 1331–28 Mordad 1332* (Tehran: Ruznamah-i Atash, 1953), 146–47. Mirashrafi claims that the fault was overcome by putschist military engineers, whose presence in the crowd points to such an eventuality having been predicted. The development was obliquely acknowledged on air.

³⁴ Text of the address at 3:33 p.m. as reproduced in FBIS, Daily Report no. 162, 1953, QQ1. The identity of this speaker remains unclear, as there was no on-air confirmation. *Ibid.*, 147 points to Mirashrafi having delivered this address. Another more notorious speech by Mirashrafi is discussed below.

³⁵ As described in Rahnema, *Coup*, 71, ‘Ali Pahlavan maintained close ties with the main British agents in charge of coup preparations, the Rashidian brothers. The *Dad* editor Abulhasan ‘Amidi-Nuri explains in memoirs published in *Ittila‘at*, 27 *Murdad 1353/*, that an ecstatic Pahlavan told him outside the Pahlavi wireless that he managed to bloodlessly overcome the chief defending officer at the building by showing him the text of the shah’s *farmān* appointing Zahedi which was printed on that day’s issue and reminding him that the monarch was the ultimate commander in chief. ‘Amidi-Nuri’s account is at odds with Mirashrafi’s self-anointed role as facilitator of the radio building takeover.

³⁶ Pirastih explains in his memoirs that he spontaneously joined the crowds outside the Shimiran transmitter building and was swiftly ushered in because he was recognized by the anti-Mosaddeq crowd. He professes that

deputy, then claimed that Mosaddeq's camp had "ruined our finances, squandering millions of the country's wealth."³⁷

Amid continuing commotion and severe background noise, the radio went briefly off air prior to resuming by broadcasting crucial misinformation at approximately 4:45 p.m. Mirashrafi finally overtly took to the microphone and celebrated the *bishārat āmiz* (joyous) news of Mosaddeq's downfall; praised the *qiyām* (rebellion), stated that "the people have burnt down Mosaddeq's house and the offices of *Ittila'at*, *Kayhan* and *Bakhtar-i Imruz*"; and announced the death of Fatimi.³⁸ According to most testimonies, Mosaddeq's residence did not fall before 6 p.m., and Fatimi had gone underground by dusk and was executed only a year later.³⁹

The first hour of chaotic, unscripted broadcasts had the effect of portraying a complete fall of the Mosaddeq administration before it actually occurred. It also sought to dissuade further resistance against the Zahedi takeover, which had already benefited from the streets being cleared of the boisterous crowds of the previous days by way of the aforementioned ban on demonstrations read out on Radio Tehran on August 18 and, in effect, never rescinded. This perception was reinforced by Zahedi's appearance at the Pahlavi wireless and the brief speech he delivered at 4:55 p.m., in which he read out the *farmān* appointing him once again, including the rule of law, decreases in the price of consumer goods, free medicine and treatment, and aid for peasants as components of his program.

Other notable individuals who spoke from the microphones of Radio Tehran to the nation after Zahedi included Mahmud Sharvin, a member of Ayatollah Kashani's inner circle, who conveyed the cleric's greetings to the nation on behalf of their political formation.⁴⁰ He was followed by Mustafa Kashani, a son of the ayatollah, who stated: "Mosaddeq undermined the Constitution. He brought the Iranian people to misery. Not one traitor shall be spared. Long live the Shah."⁴¹ And a half-brother of the shah, Prince Hamid-Riza Pahlavi also spoke.⁴² No representative from Ayatollah Burujirdi and no other senior clerics appeared.

he was unaware of the developments in the city when giving his own speech. His address, however, contains the reminder that Zahedi would take to the microphone soon, a sign that he was aware that the future prime minister was about to reach the transmitter. Mahdi Pirastah, *Niqahi az Darun bih Tarikh-i Mu'asir-i Iran: Barayi Kumak bih Tarikh: Khatirat-i Duktur Mahdi Pirastah* (Essen: Nashr-i Nima, 2008), 337. Pirastah furthermore assigns the main role in repairing the sabotaged transmitter to himself, as he relied upon his friendship with a studio technician to do so.

³⁷ The description of the broadcasts in the first phase following the takeover of Radio Tehran is primarily based on BBC SWB, part 4, no. 391, 25 August 1953; FBIS Daily Report nos. 162 and 163, 19–20 August 1953; and the special reports on the capture of Radio Tehran in *Atash* and *Dad*, 29 Murdad 1332. All of these sources are fragmented due to the continuous reception issues of the monitoring services and the hubristic press reports, which do not appear to be based on an attentive capture of the radio programs.

³⁸ This address by Mirashrafi is one of the few fragments of the 28 Murdad broadcasts to have made it into the public domain in audio format; RadioAzadegan, YouTube video, accessed 8 May 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ4kCJEZsK4>. It has been often described as the first address following the takeover of the radio by the putschists, but, as seen here, this was not the case. It appears that Mirashrafi repeatedly delayed his speech (despite being frequently urged to talk by those assembled at the studio) so he could be the speaker who effectively introduced Zahedi.

³⁹ Rahnema, *Coup*, 227–28.

⁴⁰ Sharvin is mentioned as a speaker in *Atash*, 29 Mordad 1332/20 August 1953; *Dad*, 29 Murdad 1332/20 August 1953; and *Ittila'at*, 31 Murdad 1332/22 August 1953. On the YouTube recording (RadioAzadegan, YouTube video) there is a snippet in which an unidentified voice, most likely Sharvin, is celebrating the downfall of Mosaddeq on behalf of the *Majma'-i Musalmanan-i Mujahid*, the formation which was created by Ayatollah Kashani and also included the notorious cleric-cum-politician Shams Qanatabadi. There is no mention of Sharvin's presence at the radio station in his memoirs—Hamid Karamipur, ed., *Khatirat-i Duktur Mahmud Sharvin* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Markaz-i Asnad-i Inqilab-i Islami, 2005)—which were prepared decades later by a state research institute in the Islamic Republic. Sharvin held senior government posts, such as being head of the Awqaf Organization while Kashani was allied to Mosaddeq and remained close to him and his close ally and coup supporter, Muzafar Baqa'i, after August 1953.

⁴¹ Kashani remarks in FBIS Daily Report, no.162, QQ4.

⁴² Mustafa Kashani had previously featured as his father's messenger and spokesman at Radio Tehran, for instance following the 30 Tir uprising. It is therefore very unlikely that his presence at the studio on 19 August occurred without previous consultation with the senior Kashani. Prince Hamid-Riza's brief address, reproduced

Several lesser-known figures, such as Farhad Sardarian, Farajullah Zamani, and Muhammad Rezaian, then claimed to be representing the Bakhtiari and Kurdish tribes. Finally, two party leaders, the notorious Malakih Iti'zadi, the leader of the Zulfiqar Party and likely the sole woman speaker that afternoon, and Hushang Sipihir congratulated Zahedi, with Iti'zadi calling for the execution of Mosaddeq. Sipihir added that his Ariya Party, a small extreme right-wing formation, had lost three men in the assault at Arg Square and claimed that his party's banner was flying over the building.⁴³ Toward the end of the programming, the imposition of a nightly curfew, the intention of the shah to return to the country, and the English dispatches of the Associated Press and the *New York Times*, whose correspondents were sympathetic to the coup, were read out.⁴⁴

As posited by Wilber, the takeover of Radio Tehran was the impetus for similar actions at regional stations, which progressively fell to local putschist forces. Radio Isfahan was the only one that broadcast a sign of resistance after 3:33 p.m. Both FBIS and SWB captured an appeal by Radio Isfahan at 3:58 p.m. urging its listeners to disregard the "evil voices" heard on Radio Tehran after its capture and called upon "all compatriots to unite against the traitors in Tehran to remain calm and orderly" in support of Mosaddeq. However, it too started broadcasting pro-shah messages from 7:30 p.m. onward, featuring a member of Muzaffar Baqa'i's Zahmatkishan-i Millat Party, a cleric, and a military officer. Muhammad Dayhim, the head of a royalist association in Azerbaijan, was among those who took to the microphone at Tabriz, urging calm and loyalty to the monarch.

The fate of those who appeared in the radio studios in Tehran and other cities was varied. Some, like Mihdi Pirastih, Dayhim, Mirashrafi, and Faramarzi, remained within the fold of the state elite in the post-coup order. Their accounts are mostly at odds with each other and confirm the broader lack of cohesion of the victors' hubristic and hagiographical accounts regarding the unseating of Mosaddeq. Mostafa Kashani served as a majlis deputy after the coup and was a vocal parliamentary opponent of the Consortium oil agreement. He died in unclear circumstances in 1955. The alleged tribal representatives lapsed into obscurity.

The Mosaddeq government's inability to either broadcast the rescinding of its ban on demonstrations or an appeal for resistance against the mounting coup during its control over Radio Tehran, which lasted until 2 p.m. on August 19, remains a tantalizing shortcoming in its reaction to the unfolding overthrow attempt. Both Sadiqi and 'Ilmiyah admit that the lack of adequate defense of the Arg and Old Shimiran Road facilities was an important factor that facilitated the second, successful attempt of the CIA- and MI5-ordained plotters.⁴⁵ Furthermore, at least one member of the clandestine Tudeh officers' organization, First Lieutenant Ghurban-Nijad, was in charge of a unit of four tanks guarding the Pahlavi wireless, but he too received no instruction from the party or elsewhere to repel the pro-coup assault.⁴⁶

The studios at Arg Square would feature in another momentous day in modern Iranian history when a group of revolutionaries led by a senior Fada'i-yi Khalq cadre and Qasim Siyadati attacked them on 11 February 1979 during the last moments of the Pahlavi monarchy.

in *Ittila'at*, 31 Murdad 1332/22 August 1953, was a paltry homage to the shah and reminder that the uprising had "saved the nation," underscoring the people's continued loyalty to him.

⁴³ A magazine connected to military intelligence, *Tihran Musavar*, wrote in its 30 Murdad/21 August issue that the Ariya Party was at the helm of the assault on the radio studio, along with crowds from downtown Tehran and members of the Imperial Guard.

⁴⁴ FBIS Daily Report, no. 163, 20 August, QQ6.

⁴⁵ 'Ilmiyah notes in his testament that this was a "misstep," the reasons of which have not been clarified. Ghulam-Riza Nijati, *Junbish-i Milli Shudan-i San'at-i Naft-i Iran va Kudita-yi 28 Murdad 1332* (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishar, 1986), 434.

⁴⁶ Interview with Firaydun Azarnur in *Rah-i Azadi* 24 (192): 24.